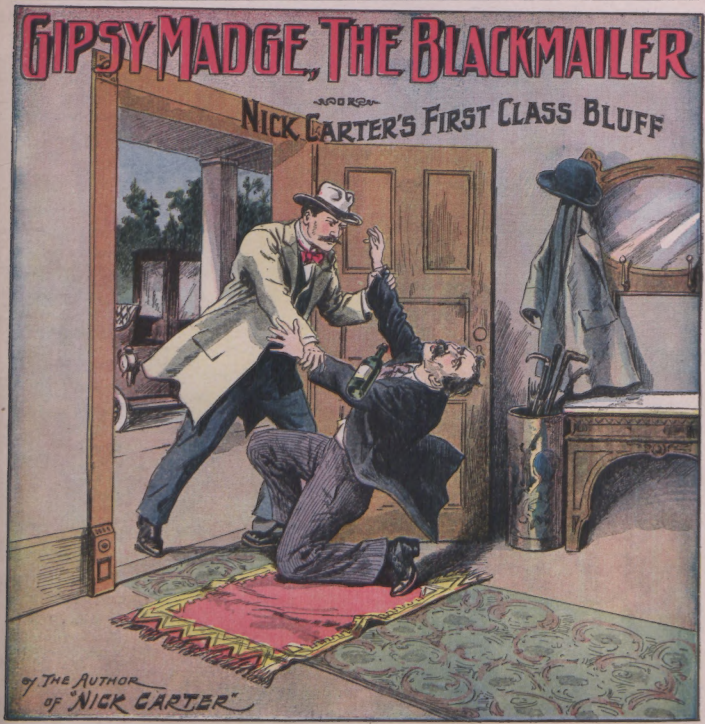
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered at Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 532 NEW YORK, MARCH 9, 1907. Price, Five Cents

GIPSY MADGE, THE BLACKMAILER

OR, NICK CARTER'S FIRST CLASS BLUFF



Nick reached out to take the bottle from him, but he took the wrists of the chauffeur instead, and twisted them until Jules dropped upon the floor in pain.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 532. NEW YORK, March 9, 1907. Price Five Cents.

Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S FIRST-CLASS BLUFF.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN ANGRY WOMAN'S THREAT.

Nick Carter was nearer to being downright angry—and to showing it—than was natural to him. He felt, indeed, that he had reason to be so.

His friend Clarence Vanderbyke was facing him from the opposite side of the study table, and it was a bit of intelligence brought to him by the young millionaire that had given rise to the anger.

Briefly, his announcement had been this:

"I have called to tell you, Nick, that Gipsy Madge is at large; very much at large, for the fact is that the committing magistrate refused to hold her for the grand jury. She was discharged yesterday morning, and already she has had the cheek to present herself in person at my house. The butler let her inside, foolishly, and—well, I am afraid I shall swear if I attempt to tell you just what she did."

And it was right here that Nick Carter expressed in forcible language his opinion of the judge who had discharged the Queen of Blackmailers from custody, and had let her loose to prey once more upon the weak and the erring.

"However," he said in conclusion, "there is not the slightest use in crying over spilt milk. The fact that we have to face is that Madge is free, and that she has already been at your house. The thing that I fear in connection with her is that she will try to do Lilian, your wife, some real injury now."

"That is what I fear, Nick. You know the threat she made when you arrested her and took her to the house to face Lilian. She told her that she would live to get even with her."

"Oh, yes, I remember it."

"Well, she repeated her threats, with interest, when she went to the house yesterday before noon."

"Tell me exactly what she said and did, Clarence."

"When the butler admitted her, she brushed past him with one of her cheery, smiling 'good mornings' and darted up the stairs toward my wife's private sitting-room before he knew what she was about; and she opened the door of my wife's room and entered, without knocking."

"As soon as she had passed inside, she closed and locked the door after her, and then she stood with her back against it, with a cruel smile on her handsome face—for you will admit that she is handsome—and for quite a little time she did not speak at all.

"In the meantime, Lilian had sprung to her feet, and with one hand on her desk, at which she had been seated, she stood facing her enemy. Jove! I should have enjoyed seeing that tableau, for Lilian isn't a bit afraid of her now."

"Go on. What next?"

"I suppose my wife must have looked frightened at first. She was startled, you know, by the suddenness of the interruption; and believing that Madge was in prison, she, of course, could not understand how it was that she was there."

"Certainly not."

"The tableau lasted for a minute or two, and then Madge laughed rather harshly, and said:

"'Oh, you need not look so scared. I haven't come here to hurt you—this time.'

"'I am not at all scared,' Lilian replied. 'Why are you here at all? That is what I wish to know.'

"'I had several reasons for coming,' said Madge. 'Of course, I wanted to get my things. That is one of them. I wanted to see you, because I had something to say to you; that is two. I wished to see Clarence, also—that is three; and the others do not matter.'

"My wife laughed at her. Then she replied:

"'Your things, as you call them, have been packed and sent out of the house. They were sent to the Standard Storehouse, and the receipt for them was mailed to you last night. Now will you be good enough to go?'

"Madge laughed at Lilian again.

"'I'll go when I get ready,' she replied. And then, after a moment, she went on:

"'I suppose, Lilian, that you are aware of all the plot I had against you, are you not? I will take it for granted that you are, anyhow. You know, at least, that I intended to get you entirely out of the way—make you kill yourself, if I could—and then marry your husband. You were onto that little game of mine, weren't you?'

"Lilian admitted that she was.

"'Well, I want you to know that I have not abandoned that part of my plot—not by a long shot. You are not as beautiful as I am, by considerable. I can give you cards and spades at that; and there are some things connected with my stay here which possibly Clarence has not told you. It was because I wished to tell you about them that I wished to have him here, also. I wanted him to hear what I had to say, and to deny it, if he could—or dared.'

"'Go on,' said Lilian. 'The sooner you have finished, the better I will be pleased.'

"Madge laughed again at that; then she said:

"'Clarence Vanderbyke does not love you, Lilian; he loves me. He has told me so time after time. It did not require that scheme of mine in which the forged letters were involved to assure him of this; he knew it before. The forged letters* were only an excuse which enabled him to admit all this to himself.'"

Vanderbyke stopped there and laughed quite heartily, and when he had done, he continued:

"That was all she told just then. What do you suppose my wife did, Nick?"

"I haven't an idea."

"She opened a drawer in the desk and took out a revolver that I keep there. It hasn't been loaded since I have owned it, but that made no difference to either of the women. It was a pistol, and that was enough. Lilian just naturally leveled the gun at Madge's head, and she said very quietly:

"'Miss Benson—if that is the name by which you prefer to be called—I am quite sure that the law would justify me, or at least a jury would do so, if I should shoot you now, where you stand. At least, I am willing to take the chances of it, and so, if you do not unlock that door, open it, and pass out through it, I will shoot; and I shall give you the time while I count ten to do as I say.'"

"Did she go?" asked Nick, smiling.

Vanderbyke grinned in sympathy with that smile.

"Say," he said, "you know just exactly how Lilian could say all that, don't you?"

The detective nodded.

"Well, Madge went. She didn't wait until the ten were counted, either. She lost no time in opening that door and getting on the other side of it; but she stopped there for a second and had her last fling; and Nick"—his face became serious again—"it is what she said then that has frightened me."

"What was it?"

"She said: 'You take this trick, Lilian Vanderbyke, but I will take the remaining twelve. I will kill you for this; kill you by inches, too. Not with a pistol or a dagger, nor yet with poison, but in a manner of my own that will make you suffer the tortures of the damned. *In less than a year from now you will be in your grave, and I will have put you there!*'"

"Just a little bit melodramatic, wasn't it?" asked the detective.

"Yes, I suppose so; but that woman meant it, Carter."

"I have no doubt that she meant it—at the time."

"Don't you suppose that she will try to carry out the threat?"

"She may—and she may not. At all events, Clarence, it is best that you should be on your guard."

*Read No. 531 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Blackmailer's Paradise."

"That is why I have come to you with the story."

"Is Lilian frightened?"

"Not at all."

"But you are; eh?"

"I am uneasy; I will admit that much."

"You say that it was yesterday morning that Madge was set at liberty?"

"Yes."

"She must have gone directly from the magistrate to your house."

"That is certainly what she did do."

"How is it that you have waited until this morning to come to me with the story?"

"One reason was, and it is a good one, I didn't know a thing about it until this morning. Lilian didn't tell me. She says she thought it would only worry me, and that she would keep it to herself; but she got to thinking it over, and came to the conclusion that it was her duty to tell me—and here I am."

"Well, anyhow, if you had come sooner you would not have found me. I have been out of town since early yesterday morning, and only just returned. It is too bad that Madge was set at liberty. However, it won't do any good to indulge in regrets now. What became of the others who were connected with that conspiracy?"

"They were held. I will get most of the money back which they got out of Lilian, but I will have to take that hotel, I expect. I shall put it up at auction the moment it comes into my hands. I don't want it."

"The Hotel Sultan might be a good property for some enterprising man," mused the detective.

"Yes; for somebody like this blackmailer outfit. I don't want any part of it for mine."

But the detective was not listening. He was thinking deeply, and at last he raised his eyes and said:

"The thing for you to do, Clarence, is to take your wife and go abroad."

"I don't want to leave the city just now, Carter."

"Nevertheless, it would be the safest thing to do."

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because if Madge meant what she said, she would not hesitate to follow us to the other side of the world, if necessary. If she is going to do anything, I would rather be here where I can get at you if I want you, than somewhere in Europe, where I don't know who I could go to."

"All the same, if I were you, I would go away. Go to Italy; or take one of those tours around the world."

"Yes. I look like it, don't I? One of the 'Personally conducted,' eh? Become a Cooky. No, I thank you. None of that for mine. Hello! There's your telephone-bell. Perhaps it is from Lilian. I told her I was coming here, and——"

But Nick had already picked up the receiver and placed it at his ear; and something in the expression of the detective's face as he listened told Vanderbyke as well as words could have done that the unexpected had happened.

And then the detective hung up the receiver hastily, sprang to his feet, and, with a shout to his friend to follow, he leaped through the door and down the stairs.

There was no time for explanations, but Vanderbyke knew intuitively that the call had come from his home, and that already Gipsy Madge had begun her campaign of vengeance.

And so, with a white face, he followed the detective out upon the street, where, by good luck, Nick's automobile was already waiting, he having ordered it an hour before; and in another moment they were speeding together up the avenue.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAMPAIGN OF VENGEANCE BEGINS.

When the automobile drew up in front of the young millionaire's home, the door of the house was standing wide open, a group of curious people had collected in front of it, and in the midst of these there was a policeman to whom Thomas—Vanderbyke's valet—was gesticulating violently while he talked; and there was blood trickling down one side of Thomas' face from a cut over his temple.

Nick noticed these particulars when he leaped from the machine to the ground; he noticed, also, that somebody was lying on his back just inside the door of the house, for the feet of a man could be seen plainly from the street.

Fortunately, Nick knew the officer to whom Thomas was talking, so when the detective brushed the crowd aside unceremoniously, and, seizing Thomas by one arm, pulled him along with him toward the house, at the same time telling the policeman to follow, the latter did so without hesitation.

A second officer was approaching on the run at the time, and at the top of the steps Nick stopped long enough to call to him to take care of the place outside, and to permit nobody to enter without his permission; and then he went inside and closed the door.

It was the butler who was lying in the hall. At first, Nick thought he was dead, although no blood was visible anywhere about him; but there was a huge welt across his forehead, while upon the floor beside him was a heavy cane that belonged to the master of the house, doubtless left where it had fallen after the blow had been struck.

And what a blow it was, too!

One with a skull less thick than the butler must have been killed; but as he already manifested signs of returning consciousness, Nick left him to the ministrations

of the others of the party, while he devoted himself to finding out what had happened from Thomas.

That is, he called to Thomas to follow him, and he went up the stairs two or three at a time, and so dashed into the private sitting-room which Lilian Vanderbyke used almost exclusively when she was at home.

The first glance inside the room told him that Lilian was no longer there, and he saw also that the place was in great confusion; but he stopped at the threshold and held Thomas back.

"Wait!" he said. "Tell me here, before we go any farther, what has happened?"

"I don't know what happened," was the reply.

"Tell me what you do know."

"I was in my master's rooms, making up my monthly accounts; I heard a scream; it sounded like madam; I ran out into the hall, and I saw Miss Benson and madam struggling together in the hall, right here, in front of this door. Then two men leaped out of the room; they had been inside, and I did not see them until then. One of them struck my mistress in the back of the head, and she fell. I forgot that there was a telephone in the master's room, and I started for the library, to use the one that is there. One of the men tried to stop me at the head of the stairs, and I struck him. Somehow, I managed to knock him down. I don't know how I did it—but I did."

"Go on! Go on! Never mind that."

"When I hit him he fell, and I ran down the stairs. I ran to the library and picked up the receiver. I remembered your number, and called for it instantly. Fortunately, I got it at once, and you answered. I tried to tell you what had happened, but as I was in the act of doing so one of the men came into the library after me. He threw something at me—I don't know what it was, but it knocked me off the chair, and so that I fell to the floor. I jumped up and tried to run out after the man who had hit me. I saw him strike the butler with a cane, and saw him leave by the front door. I ran to the door, and got there in time to see a big automobile, with a limousine body, start away from the curb at the rate of sixty miles an hour. It might have been our automobile, for all I know. It looked like it."

"Did you see anybody inside of it?"

"I didn't have time; but I suppose that——"

"Never mind what you suppose. What did you do then?"

"I set up a yell, running after the machine, and I met the officer. By that time the automobile had turned the corner and disappeared. We came back here, and——"

"And I know the rest. Go down-stairs now and assist them with the butler. I wish to talk to him as soon as he is able to talk. I will be down in a moment."

As the detective turned to enter the partly dismantled room, Vanderbyke joined him, for he had also rushed up the stairs, although not so fast as Nick.

"Stay out here a moment, Clarence," said the detective.

"But where is Lilian? Is she in there? Have they killed——"

"No, no, no. They have taken her away, that is all."

"Taken her away?"

"Yes. Madge was here. She brought two men with her. They had an automobile. I suppose, from what Thomas says, that she had somehow got possession of your wife's machine. At all events, they have gotten safely way, and have taken Lilian with them."

"They will kill her; they——"

"They won't do anything of the kind. If they had intended to kill her, they would have attended to it while they were here, and not have taken the trouble to carry her off."

He passed inside the room then.

"Stand there in the doorway, Clarence," he said. "Wait there until I tell you that you can enter, and try to keep still for a moment."

Then he looked about the room.

He saw at once that there had been quite a struggle there before Lilian had succumbed to her assailant, for, according to Thomas, Madge had entered the room alone; or, at least, if they had assisted her in seizing upon Lilian, she had broken away from them and attempted to escape by running into the hall.

At all events, the table in the center of the room was overturned, and everything that had rested upon it was now scattered about the floor, and many of the articles were broken, thus adding to the appearance of a wreck.

A chair was overturned, and one arm was broken; and this, Nick thought, must have been the chair in which Lilian was seated when she was attacked.

A drawer of the desk was pulled out, the contents were scattered on the floor, and for a moment Nick thought that the men had rifled it in search of something; but then he saw a revolver lying on the carpet, and he smiled, for he remembered what Vanderbyke had said about the pistol that had not been loaded since he had owned it.

"Lilian overturned that chair herself," he mused, "as she jumped from it to get hold of the pistol. She pulled that drawer out herself, too. In her haste, she pulled it too far out, so that she defeated her own object, for the drawer, with its contents, fell to the floor, and, of course, the revolver was spilled with them. I don't think she even had her hand on the weapon."

Vanderbyke, in the doorway, nodded.

"Hurry up, Nick, for Heaven's sake!" he said.

The detective paused in his survey of the room and looked at his friend.

He saw that Vanderbyke's face was drawn and hag-

gard, and he realized for the first time what agony the man was trying to endure in patience, knowing it was best that Nick should not be disturbed while he was making his survey.

"Brace up, old chap!" he said to him. "I don't think it is half so bad as it looks."

"But what has happened, Nick? Tell me that."

"Madge has begun to take her vengeance a little sooner than we anticipated, that is all."

"But——"

"Wait just a minute now, Clarence."

"All right."

"I don't want you to get frightened, or to lose your head. I really do not think there is cause for that."

"All right, old man. I'll try to hold myself in. Tell me what you do think about it."

"I think that your wife is safe from bodily harm, at the present time. I think that Gipsy Madge has stolen her away by force, because she intends to make use of her as a lever against you. In other words, I believe that if she had any intention of doing Lilian any bodily harm, she would not have taken her away, as she has done."

"I will try to think as you do; but, all the same, let's lose no time in beginning the search for her."

"Certainly not."

Thomas reappeared at the door at that moment, and announced that the butler was able to tell what he knew, and Nick added:

"While I am talking with your butler, do you go to the library and call up your garage. Ask if it was your wife's machine that was here, or, rather, ask if it is there. If it is not, we may consider that Madge somehow got possession of it, and has used it in coming here."

Nick found that the butler was still somewhat weak from the effects of the blow he had received, but he was able to tell what had happened.

"When the door-bell rang, I opened it, to find that two men were standing there," he said. "One of them was the chauffeur who has worked for madam for a month; the other one I did not know. I was under the impression that the chauffeur had been discharged, but I was not sure; and when I saw him there I supposed that I had been mistaken. At least, I admitted him, and the other man stepped inside with him.

"The instant they were inside the door, the chauffeur seized me and threw me down, for he is very strong. He held me by the throat, and together the two men dragged me into the drawing-room and closed the door.

"Then one of them—the stranger—tried to chloroform me, but I held my breath as soon as I discovered what he was up to, and so avoided the fumes of the drug to a great extent.

"But I feigned unconsciousness, and after a moment they believed that I was quite so; with the result that they soon left me.

"As soon as they were gone, I tried to get to my feet, but found that it was for a moment impossible, for the drug had had more effect upon me than I thought; however, at last I managed to get to the door and to throw it open, and just as I did so, and staggered out into the hall. I saw the same two men, and also Miss Benson, who used to live here——"

"Oh, cut it short," said Nick. "Your English would do for a schoolmaster. What I want are the facts."

"Yes, sir. Miss Benson and the two men had just arrived at the foot of the stairs, and they were carrying Mrs. Vanderbyke between them. When I tried to interfere, and I would have you understand that, although weak, I did not hesitate to do so, one of the men seized a cane that belongs to Mr. Vanderbyke and knocked me down with it. That is the very last that I remember."

"Did you recognize the machine that was outside as being the one that belongs to your mistress?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you, in the momentary view that you had of your mistress when they were carrying her down the stairs, notice if she had been injured in any way?"

"Oh, sir, I hope not. I don't know. I think she must have been unconscious, for her head was hanging backward, as if she were."

"You saw no blood?"

"No, sir."

"You say that one of the men was the chauffeur; would you recognize the other one if you should see him again?"

"Most certainly, sir. A more villainous face I never saw—although he was dressed like a gentleman. But I would know him. I would know him."

"Was there any one outside with the machine when you admitted the two men?"

"Yes, sir. A man was in the driver's seat."

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER PLANS A FIRST-CLASS BLUFF.

The policeman who waited in front of the house and the one who entered it with the detective, each had to make their report to the captain of the precinct, and so Nick thought it was best to send out a general alarm for Mrs. Vanderbyke, which he did; and as soon as that was done, he drew Clarence into the library and closed the door.

"Now, Clarence," he said, "there is absolutely nothing that you can do, in person, for the present—that is, there is only one thing that you can do."

"What is that?" asked the stricken man. "Heaven knows that I must do something."

"Who engaged that chauffeur when you first got him for your wife?"

"I did."

"Where did you get him?"

"He was recommended to me by——"

"Never mind telling me whom. I will tell you what you can do."

"Well?"

"Go to the man or the men who recommended him, and find out from them, if you can, all that is to be learned about the fellow's antecedents. I want to know where he has worked before, and, in fact, everything that is to be found out about him. That will give you something to do, and the information may prove to be very useful to me."

"I can do that."

"You remember, don't you—or perhaps I did not tell you—that he was hand in glove with the gang of blackmailers who worked from the security of the Hotel Sultan?"

Vanderbyke nodded.

"I don't think I told you, because I did not have occasion to do so, that I had Patsy make himself up to represent that chauffeur. His name is Jules Renier, isn't it "

"Yes."

"I had the fellow locked up in my house for a few hours the other day, but when I found that the thing was all over, I turned him loose again. Now, what I want you to do is this: Go at once back again to my house. Patsy is there. Tell him that I want him to make up again, as quickly as he can, in the character of Jules Renier. After that he is to go with you, in one of your machines, while you make the inquiries about him."

"But what is the idea of having the man with me about whom I am supposed to be making inquiries? For if Patsy is made up to represent Jules, those whom I ask about him will suppose all the time that it is Jules who is outside with me."

"Exactly; and that is what I wish them to suppose. You must carry the idea that you are especially pleased with the man, and think of promoting him. A touch of jealousy on the part of other chauffeurs will make them want to do a little 'knocking,' and you will be much more likely to get the information you want, than if you were supposed to be hunting a criminal. Those fellows will go to any lengths to protect one of their fraternity who is accused of wrong-doing, but I have yet to hear of one who has good to say of another who is getting ahead a bit faster than his brethren. See the point?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Go ahead. What you have to do will occupy you till evening. Then, if you can, meet me at my house and have dinner with me. I will try to have some news of Lilian by that time. You can take a surface-care down, or walk. I'm going to use my machine."

"Are you going to try to trail the Mercedes, the machine which took Lilian away?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could go with you."

"You can do much more good in the manner I have told you."

"All right."

As soon as he was gone, Nick left the house. When he entered his machine he drove it at once to the hotel where the blackmailers had hung out before he broke up their operations; but all the same, as the hotel was still open and running, and as he had never found out just how many persons there were who were directly connected with the gang, he thought that possibly there would be some information obtainable there.

He recalled, too, the fact that Chick had said to him that there were more mysteries than one connected with the management of that place, and he thought this as good a time as any to make a little further investigation into the matter.

The alleged proprietor of the Hotel Sultan was now in the Tombs, awaiting indictment and trial, and his manager, Conklin, was there with him; but the hotel was still running, and one of the clerks had been left in charge.

It had been established, of course, that Mrs. Vanderbyke's money had purchased the place, and a temporary receiver had been placed in charge; but he was a lawyer, who could not give his attention to the affairs of the place, and so it had been deemed wise that he should retain the staff, as far as possible.

Nick, in advising this course, had had in mind what Chick had said to him, and he had intended to give his attention to the place as soon as he could. Now seemed to be the time.

When he arrived at the hotel he found the clerk already in charge. He evidently felt the responsibility of his new position as acting manager, for he was leaning back in the proprietor's chair, in the private office, smoking an expensive cigar, when the detective entered.

"You need not get up," said Nick ironically, as he entered the private office. "You appear to be far too comfortable to be disturbed. You know who I am?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, yes."

"I would like to see that last message you received from Mordaunt," said the detective.

The clerk started guiltily. He colored to the roots of his hair and then turned pale.

"The last—letter?" he faltered.

"Yes," said Nick. "I suppose you have already received several since your former master was taken to jail. Where are they?"

"Really, sir, I——"

"I wouldn't take the trouble to lie about it if I were you," said Nick coldly. "I see very plainly that you have received such letters. Your manner tells me that. How would you like to occupy a cell immediately adjoining Mordaunt's? He wouldn't have to send letters to you, in that case. He could talk; eh?"

"Oh, sir! I—— You are joking, of course."

"Joking! I never was more in earnest in my life. Where are those letters?"

"I destroyed them, sir, as soon as I read them."

"As he directed you to do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quite so; but you remember very well what was in them, don't you?"

"I'm—I'm afraid that I do not, sir; only generally."

"Very well, tell me—generally—what they contained."

"They were merely about the conduct of the hotel, and my care of the guests, sir; really." The acting manager was recovering his equanimity, and also his assurance now. And Nick believed that it was more than likely that he *had* destroyed the letters, for it would not be the policy of a member of such a gang as that one had been, and doubtless still was, to preserve incriminating document.

"I will question you a little further on that point presently," said the detective. "For the present, there is something else that I would like to know."

"Indeed, sir, I shall be happy to supply you with all the information in my power."

"Then tell me exactly what time it was when Gipsy Madge came here yesterday."

"Gipsy Madge—came here—yesterday? Really——"

"Look here, mister—I don't know what your name is and it doesn't much matter."

"My name is Anthony Clark."

"Very well. It will be just as well for you, if you don't try to deceive me. I know that Gipsy Madge was here yesterday; I know that she stayed here last night; I know that she held a long interview with Jules Renier while——"

"I will tell you all I know, sir."

"Good. You are sensible—if you wish to keep out of jail."

"I have done nothing to get into jail."

"That remains to be seen. What time did that woman come here yesterday?"

"About half-past ten in the morning, sir."

"Now look me in the eye and tell me the truth. Remember, while you are doing it, that I know a lot about it already, and if you make a mistake, I am likely to know it."

"I will tell you the truth if I tell you anything."

"That sounds very nice. But see that you do. Now, when you held that interview——"

"To what interview do you refer, sir?"

"If you listen, you will find out, doubtless. When you held that important interview—at least, Madge regarded it as important, although I think you must have thought it very risky—weren't there four of you present?"

"Four, sir? Really——"

"Just answer me with yes, or no."

"There were four present, part of the time. But——"

"Never mind the buts. There were Madge, Jules, yourself, and—who was the other one?"

"Ed Pineaud."

"The perfumery man?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"It is almost the same name, isn't it? But I wish to say at once, sir, that I did not remain with them during the interview. That is the truth, so help——"

"I believe you. You discovered that they were going to discuss something which you preferred not to know about at the time, or, rather, which you deemed it safer to be ignorant about. But you know that the subject had to do with Mrs. Vanderbyke, don't you?"

"I know that much; but no more about it."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that you do not know that Madge had determined to visit some sort of revenge upon Mrs. Vanderbyke, and that the consultation was called in order to lay her plans for that very thing?"

"I knew that the lady you mention was to be the subject of the conversation, but beyond that I knew nothing, and do not know anything now."

"Do you mean to say that you got out as soon as her name was mentioned?"

"I do. I got out of the room before there was a word said between the three about anything, and Madge agreed with me——"

He stopped abruptly, bit his lip, and flushed. Nick laughed aloud.

"Go on," he said. "You were about to say that Madge agreed with you that it was just as well for all concerned, considering the fact that you were to remain here in charge of the hotel for a while, that you should not be informed of their plans. I can understand that, and why Madge should think so. But I know a little bit of what they planned. For one thing, the man Jules was to go to the garage and obtain possession of the automobile he used to drive before he was fired. He thought that probably they would not know at the garage that he had been discharged, and that he could, therefore, obtain possession of the car without any trouble. Isn't that so?"

"I think he suggested something of that sort to me down here; but I ordered him out of the hotel at once."

Nick laughed again.

"He didn't go, did he? Hardly, since he was present at that interview. Mr. Clark, you are what might be

called a 'peach.' You are as ingenuous as a maiden. But I know enough about the interview already. We will get down to 'cases' now. You know when the automobile drew up in front of the door to-day, don't you? You know when Madge, and Pineaud, and—we won't mention the name of the other one just now—got into it, don't you? You know when the machine drove away from here, don't you? And you know when it returned, and what and whom it brought here, don't you? I see by your face that you do; *and, Mr. Clark, I want you to tell me at once where those people are—unless you wish to go to the Tombs—now!*"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACKMAILING OCTOPUS.

When the detective entered the hotel he had no idea at all regarding what would take place there. Convinced as he was that practically every employee of the place was in sympathy with Gipsy Madge and her followers, he had resorted to the specious bluffing we have seen in order to draw, or, rather, to force, Anthony Clark, the clerk, to speak.

And now, as the detective made the demand upon the clerk to tell all he knew, assuming himself the attitude of one who was already informed, he was surprised, as well as pleased, to see the effect he produced.

Clark's face turned frightfully pale the instant the demand was made. He moved uneasily in his chair, and caught his breath twice as he tried to speak.

Nick saw that he had surprised a guilty knowledge in the man; he saw that Clark twice attempted to lie out of the trap into which he had fallen, and that each time he hesitated to utter the falsehood that was on the tip of his tongue, fearing that the shrewd detective would catch him in the lie, and would carry out his threat to send him to the Tombs at once.

And Nick waited in patience and in silence for the man to speak.

But at last, when no sound was forthcoming, although the clerk's lips moved again and again, he repeated his demand, even more quietly than before, but still with added emphasis; and then he said:

"You know where Gipsy Madge and her captive are at this moment, Clark. Where are they?"

"I don't, Mr. Carter. I do not, so help me!"

Nick drew a pair of handcuffs from one of his pockets and rattled them.

"Answer me," he said coldly.

"They—they—came here."

"I thought so," said Nick coolly. "They are still here, in this house, are they not?"

"I do not know; really, I do not."

"What? Not know if they are still here? Haven't you just admitted that they came here?"

"Yes."

"And isn't it true that you have not been away from this hotel to-day?"

"Yes."

"How is it, then, that you do not know that they are still in the building?"

"Because, if you know so much, you must also know that it would have been an easy matter for Madge to have left the house by one of the other entrances; and you know there are others."

Most men in Nick Carter's place at that moment would have leaped to their feet and have started at once to find the people who had entered the house; but Nick knew that his mine of information was directly in front of him, and that he could gain nothing by undue haste, particularly at that juncture.

Instead of starting forward at once and demanding that he be taken immediately to the room, or rooms, to which Madge had conducted her captive, he remained quietly in his chair; he drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it—and then he asked quietly:

"I suppose that, really, Madge had no idea of remaining in the hotel more than a few moments, did she?"

"She intended to pass directly through it; I know that much," was the astounding reply; and Nick knew positively, at last, that he was on the right track. Heretofore, it had been only rough conjecture and guesswork; now it was certainty; but the clerk continued:

"I know that there were some things of hers here that she wished to take away with her. She came to get those things, and, having secured them, she doubtless left at once by one of the other exits."

"Doubtless. Now, Clark, you have committed yourself thus far, it will be well for you if you tell me all you know."

"I see that. I know it. I will tell you all I know about it. The truth is that, before she left here to go to the house of Mrs. Vanderbyke, I told her that she must not return here. She laughed at me for that, and replied that she would do exactly as she pleased about that. Need I confess that I am afraid of her?"

"No; I think you would be afraid of your shadow if it should happen to menace you. Go on, Mr. Clark."

"I told her that I must wash my hands of her and of the whole outfit, and——"

"And you got yourself laughed at again, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"When the automobile returned here, and Mrs. Vanderbyke was brought inside, I tell you the truth when I say that I did not know they were here at all until they had ascended in the elevator."

"I can believe you. Go on."

"I was told, however, when the elevator came down again, for the boy came to the office door and informed

me. I sent him back to tell Madge that she must leave the hotel at once."

Nick laughed aloud.

"Why didn't you take the message yourself?" he asked.

The clerk shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not tired of life just yet," he said. "I preferred to send the message rather than to take it."

"And what message did she return to you by the elevator-boy?"

"She sent word for me to go to the devil."

"Not particular about her manners, was she? What did you do then?"

"Nothing."

"And what have you done since?"

"Nothing."

"So you do not know whether she left the house or not?"

"I do not."

"She couldn't very well take the automobile up in the elevator with her. What became of that?"

"It left the front of the house as soon as Madge got out of it."

"You say that it left the front of the house; do you mean by that that it doubtless went around to one of those other exits to which you have referred?"

"Yes."

"Did the elevator-boy tell you that Mrs. Vanderbyke walked into the hotel, or was she carried in?"

"She walked in, although she was supported on either side."

"By whom?"

"Sir Roslyn on one side and Jules Renier on the other."

"And who was left in charge of the machine at the door?"

"I have told you that it was driven away at once."

"Who drove it away?"

"Craddock, I suppose."

"Eh? Who is Craddock? Oh! he was the third man of that outfit."

"Yes."

"Another chauffeur?"

"Yes."

"So there were three chauffeurs: Jules, Pineaud, and Craddock. I suppose, in their capacity of chauffeurs, they have proved themselves very worthy arms of this blackmailing octopus that has flourished here; eh?"

Clark hung his head and made no reply; but at last he said:

"Mr. Carter, I am trying to save my own neck in this matter. I made up my mind a moment ago that I would tell you all I know, and to throw myself upon your generosity not to make it go too hard with me. If you will ask questions, I will answer, and I will tell you the truth as far as I know it."

"All right," replied the detective. "The degree of my generosity as exhibited to you will depend entirely upon yourself. If you carry out the purpose you have mentioned and are utterly and entirely frank with me, it will be much better for you; but if, on the other hand, I find that you have withheld information that would be of assistance to me, I will make it worse for you than if you had said nothing at all. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"Then we are to conclude that while Madge and Jules assisted Mrs. Vanderbyke to a room somewhere in the upper part of this house, Pineaud and Craddock took the machine around to one of the other exits, there to await the time when they should come out again?"

"Yes."

"Do you, or do you not, know that they *did* go out of the house again? And by 'the house' I mean any and all parts of this nest of iniquity that has flourished here. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"Now answer the other question."

"Honestly I do not know whether they went out or if they are still somewhere about these buildings."

"Now, where are those other exits that you have referred to?"

"One is on the adjoining street; the other opens on the avenue."

"And what are those exits?"

"One—that one on the avenue—is an employment agency for upper servants; the other—the one on the adjoining street—is the 'Chauffeurs' Club.'"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the detective. "You certainly had it all down fine, didn't you?"

"Yes. That was all the arrangement of Gipsy Madge and Mordaunt."

"And you have worked your blackmailing dodge by supplying upper servants, such as maids, valets, butlers, housekeepers, chauffeurs and coachmen, and footmen, to such employers as you intended to make your victims."

"Yes."

Nick sat very still, and was absolutely silent for several moments after that revelation.

The stupendousness of it startled him. The endless ramifications of such a scheme could be figured out only in multiples, and the combinations that could be thus formed for preying upon victims of the blackmailer's art were non-figurable.

He rose presently, and passed to the door, which he closed and locked. Then he returned to his chair and fixed his eyes steadily upon Clark, who was regarding him affrightedly, and with a nervous twitching of his eyelids which showed under what a strain he was laboring.

"Clark," said the detective seriously and slowly, "listen to me."

"Yes, sir."

"I had no idea of stumbling upon quite such a mare's nest as this one is. It is much greater and infinitely more villainous than I supposed it to be—*and it has got to be broke up, root and branch.*"

"Yes, sir."

"A little while ago I referred to it all as an octopus; but I had no idea how many arms the machinery of it possessed."

"No. I suppose not."

"And now I see that it is in this condition: That if we chop off an arm or two, like sending the chief of it all in the person of Mordaunt, to prison, the arms that remain, keep on working—a case of 'Everybody works but father'; eh?"

"Just about that, Mr. Carter."

"Very well; I have got you dead to rights, now; just where I want you. If you don't help me, all the way through this thing to the end, telling me all you know, I will send you up the river on different counts until I get you about twenty years, or more. If you *do* help me——"

"Well, sir?"

"I'll some day turn my back and let you prove whether you can run or not."

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET DOOR.

"I'll help you, Mr. Carter; I will, I promise you."

"That goes without saying, since you have *got* to do it. How many of the servants and employees of this house are mixed up in this thing?"

"Every one, sir. There is not an employee here to-day who is not at the mercy of Mordaunt, but, of course, since he has been sent to prison, there have been a few desertions."

"The more honor to those who deserted. Now, who is the chief of affairs, since the imprisonment of Mordaunt?"

"Wait a moment, sir. To reply to that question unhesitatingly, I will have to explain affairs a little."

"Go on."

"There are, or have been, three partners in the business, not to mention Gipsy Madge at all. The chief of the whole business was Mordaunt. Next to him came Cadwalador and then Fink."

"And who was Cadwalador and Fink?"

"I was about to tell you that. Cadwalador is nominally president of the Chauffeurs' Club; Fink is at the head of the employment agency; Mordaunt was, he proprietor of this hotel."

"Well?"

"The strange part of it all is—and it is something that none of us can understand—that Cadwalador and Fink both disappeared when Mordaunt was arrested. Of course, they are merely laying low, to avoid being put under arrest. Neither one of them has showed up since."

The detective nodded his head, and a peculiar light came into his eyes.

"I think I understand that," he said. "Let me ask you a question right here. Did you ever happen to see those three men together? Or have you ever seen two of them together, or at the same time?"

A puzzled look settled upon Clark's face, and he replied, after a moment's thought.

"No. I do not think I ever did."

"Well, go on with your relation. Who are Cadwalador and Fink."

"I have told you all that I know about them. Cadwalador, as the head of the club of chauffeurs, directed everything over there. He received the reports of the chauffeurs—about what their employers did or might do—about anything which might be used against them to make them give up money, and Fink did the same thing for the upper servants. Then, there has always been a fourth character—and he has also disappeared for a time."

"Who was he?"

"We have known him only by the name of Slick. He was the collector; the rat; the one who did all of the really dirty work."

"It strikes me that it is all dirty work. What about the man Slick?"

"He has always been in the habit of appearing and disappearing mysteriously. He was always around when he was least expected, and sometimes there have been many days at a time when he did not show up at all, so it is not strange that I have not seen him for some time."

"As a matter of fact, you have not seen him, either, since the arrest of Mordaunt, have you, Clark?"

"No, sir."

"Have you ever read a story by a French author called 'The Clique of Gold'?"

"No."

"I recommend that you should read it. I think that Mordaunt, from what you tell me, has not only read it, but that he has endeavored to take a lesson from it. But never mind that. The point is, that since the arrest of Mordaunt, the other three important personages in this business have made themselves scarce around here; eh?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me just what Madge has to do with it all."

"Madge was—and is now, I suppose—the queen of the bunch."

"Then how did you dare to order her out of the house?"

"I only suggested that she should go in order to save us all. She saw the point as plainly as I did."

"And so now, that she is also gone, who is the head of the business?"

"There is no head. Orders come from nobody knows where in cipher. They are transmitted to the employees of the hotel through me, and to the other departments through Jules and the fellow Craddock."

"I see. So, in the absence of Mordaunt, and his *alter egos*, you are practically at the head of things. Is that it?"

"No. I am boss here, in the hotel, but I am not liked in the other departments. Craddock and Jules and Pinçaud would any of them knife me—murder me, in fact—if it could be done without discovery."

"Well, Clark, the first thing to be done, is to find Mrs. Vanderbyke and restore her to her husband and her home; after that, I will give my attention to the blackmailing part of the business. Now do I understand that you have enlisted to assist me, under my promise to give you, personally, a chance to escape—in time?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Understand me, I never adopt any half-way measures. I shall give you plenty of head-room, but you must know at the start that if you hit it against anything the blow will be so hard that you will never recover from the effects of it. Are you on?"

"I am; thoroughly."

"Then I will give you my orders at once."

"I am ready."

"I want you to set the machinery of this nest at work at once, to find out, without delay, where Mrs. Vanderbyke is being detained. You can do that—*you must do it.*"

"I think I can do it."

"You *must* do it. Tell me a word or two more about the fellow Slick."

"I cannot tell you much more about him save that everybody was and is deathly afraid of him. He is a sort of chief. He sometimes defied Mordaunt himself!"

"To his face!" asked Nick, in evident surprise.

"No. But he called him names behind his back, and if one of the employees was surprised into agreeing with him—he got it in the neck very soon afterward."

"Is that a camera that I see up there on top of the desk?" asked Nick, abruptly changing the subject.

"Yes."

"Whose is it? To whom does it belong?"

"It is mine. I have been the photographer of the outfit. Mordaunt has a great many compromising pictures in his possession. They have been one of the most useful sources of his income."

"What utter scoundrels! And you have taken the pictures?"

"Yes, most of them. Nearly all of them, in fact."

"What sort of pictures?"

"Compromising pictures. If Mr. Jones strolled on the street with Mrs. Brown, or if Mr. Adams took Mrs. Anybody at all to dinner, I got a picture of it, if I could. If an automobile-party was to go out late at night, I would be told of a good place where the chauffeur would pass and at what hour he would be there, and it was my duty to make a flash-light picture of the company. I have obtained some very——"

"Oh, I haven't a doubt about it. But there is another point which interests me more deeply than that."

"Yes?" asked the clerk.

"Did you ever take any pictures for yourself alone, Clark?"

"Really, sir, I——"

"Out with it!"

"Only a few."

"Such as—what?"

"Of the four chiefs."

"Exactly. That is what I wished to know."

"You see, sir, I have expected that some day there would be an upheaval here, as there is soon to be now. I watched my opportunity, and I have good pictures of Mordaunt, of Cadwalador, of Fink, and of Slick—pictures which I could use if the occasion should arise, so that they would have to take their medicine along with me; so that they could not sneak out of their own responsibilities for what has occurred here. You see, sir, they have something up their sleeves against every man and woman in their employ—usually it is something that would send that particular man or woman to prison—or worse."

"Exactly; and you obtained these pictures in order that you might defend yourself as against your employers, if any one of them should take it into his head to threaten you."

"That is it; yes."

"That was an exceedingly wise precaution on your part. Now, what I wish you to do at once is to produce those four pictures. Bring them here to me and leave them with me while you go and start that ball rolling about finding out what has become of Mrs. Vanderbyke."

"I will have to go to my room to get them. They are hidden away where nobody but I can find them."

"Go and get them then—*now!*"

"You have no fear that I will not return to you with them?"

"No. If you do not return, in mighty short order, you will wish all the rest of your life that you had done so. Go!"

He went; but he was back again in a surprisingly

short time, and he laid the photographs on the table before the detective.

"You are an excellent photographer, all right," said Nick, as he glanced at them without appearing at the moment to be especially interested in them.

"You may go now, and attend to that other part of the business," he added. "And I advise you to see to it thoroughly that it is done right. When you return I want you to be able to tell me where Mrs. Vanderbyke is detained. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will wait here for you; but stay!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are Mordaunt's private living-rooms? His dressing-room and sleeping-room? You may take me to them and leave me there, only, when you return, you may look for me here. Give me your key to this private office. I will probably be here when you return; unless——"

"Unless what, sir?"

"Unless something should happen to me in the meantime. One cannot always foresee events."

"That is true, sir. I only hope that old Papa Slick will not turn up. I have been living in dread of him every moment."

"I would ask nothing better. Now, take me to those rooms of Mordaunt's."

Clark had been all the time seated in front of a high desk which supported a cabinet of pigeonholes on top of it. Now he shoved back his chair, and, reaching under the desk, pulled upon a lever that was concealed there, and instantly the whole desk swung out away from the wall, disclosing an opening behind it that was of the height and width of an ordinary door, and revealing a bare anteroom beyond it.

"The rooms are there, Mr. Carter," he said. "I discovered this lever, which works the concealed door, by accident. But what you see is all I know. I have not dared to enter; I have not gone farther toward them than I am now, for I know that there are concealed dangers in there, and that it is as much as your life is worth to venture beyond that secret door. What lies beyond there I do not know; but—I would rather, right now, go to prison for twenty years than to take the risk of trying to find out."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK ENTERS A NEW SCENE.

Nick, who had stepped to the door of the office, sent him from the room; and his parting injunction to his new confederate was this:

"You are not to return until you have something to tell me. But see to it that you do not delay your coming after the moment when you have anything to report. Now, go."

Before the detective made any move at all to enter the mysterious rooms beyond the secret door he carefully studied the mechanism of the arrangement, and was soon in possession of all its mysteries. He learned how it was opened and closed from either side, and, with that knowledge in his possession, he passed through and closed the door after him.

As has been said, the room immediately beyond the swinging desk was small, and almost entirely bare of furniture; and there was but one other door leading out of it.

That was upon the right, out of sight from the office, when the swinging desk was open; and across its panels was a plainly lettered sign which read:

"Death lies beyond this door for him who enters without permission."

"That is interesting," thought the detective, as he paused to read it. "Now, I wonder just what form of death the ingenuity of Mordaunt has provided? The thing has the appearance of being harmless enough."

He thought over it a moment, and then he returned to the office and secured a cane that he had seen there, standing in one of the corners. With that, he returned to the small room, and, crossing to the door with the sign upon it, he turned the knob slowly.

It yielded to his touch readily enough; then the detective stepped back out of the way, and, crouching low, he pushed the door quickly open with the cane.

Instantly there was a sharp report, such as a 22-caliber cartridge might make, and Nick smiled when he realized that if he had followed the opening of the door, by pushing his body with it, the little bullet would have lodged somewhere in his vitals.

A short examination revealed the fact that a curious spring was connected with the door-jamb on the inside—that is, beyond the door—in such a manner that when the door was pushed open the spring was worked; and in working it fired a 22-cartridge slantingly along the face of the door so that the bullet would have inflicted an unpleasant wound in the shoulder of a man who was trying to enter—provided he did not keep out of the way as Nick had done.

But now the detective stepped through into the adjoining room without further hesitation, and here he was amazed by the evidences of luxury which confronted him on every hand.

It was evident that Mordaunt, at least, was possessed of exquisite taste, for, although the room was ventilated and lighted only from the top, where a sixth extended in a glass dome upon the roof, it was, nevertheless, perfectly appointed in every particular. A prince with the riches of the world at his command could not have been more sumptuous in his requisition of adornments.

And the detective understood, moreover, that he was no longer in the hotel building.

He knew that by the distance to the roof over his head; and when he paused to remember, he recalled the fact that the private office from which he had obtained his admittance was at the extremity of one side of the building.

One door only besides that through which he entered led from this room, and it was directly opposite the other.

This, too, was closed and locked, and, after turning the key, Nick employed the same precautions that he had made use of before—only, this time, nothing happened. There were no more cartridges to explode in his ear.

The door gave upon another room that was even larger, and which was a sleeping-room.

This, like the other, was lighted and ventilated from above. It contained the usual articles of furniture and otherwise of a sleeping-room. Additional light was, of course, obtained by turning on an electric switch.

But here there were several doors—four, in fact—three of which gave into closets, and each closet was sumptuously supplied with clothing. The fourth opened upon a narrow and dark hallway.

Nick closed all these doors after he had peered behind each one; and he seated himself upon an easy chair under one of the electric lights, and, having drawn a small table close to him, he laid the photographs upon it—the photographs which, until now, he had barely looked at, although he was well aware of the value they would be to him.

"What another man can do, I can do," he said to himself aloud, smiling, as he looked upon the pictures. "It is very plain to me that Mordaunt was in turn each of the other characters in the working of his plots. He could change himself from Mordaunt into Cadwalador, into Fink, or Papa Slick, at will. It is a very old and a very clever scheme, and it requires an exceedingly clever man to carry it out, but Mordaunt *is* a clever man, and he has done it.

"He was, by turns, Mordaunt; then Cadwalador, then Fink—and when he desired to spy upon his employees, or to collect his tithes, he made himself into Papa Slick.

"The contents of the closets prove all that, if I had not known it before; the mysterious disappearance of the remaining three characters at the time of the arrest of Mordaunt would establish it satisfactorily to me, even if I had never read 'The Clique of Gold.'"

He looked around the room a moment and then he smiled again.

"Yes, down the passageway," he mused aloud, "and in a secret way to each of his other offices. When he wished to go to the employment agency on the avenue, he went through that door and played Fink; and when he wished to pose as Cadwalador, the president of the Chauffeurs' Club, he went through that same door, and turned off somewhere, so that his route took him to the club-rooms in the adjoining street. Good again!

"There should also be a third way out through that passage; another branch from it which would lead to another secret exit to this maze of buildings, which he kept religiously to himself, in order that, in an emergency, it would afford him a means of escape. The only mistake about that was, that he did not have time to make use of it when I came here to arrest him—and he got caught. Gee! I didn't suppose I was arresting four men, when I took Mordaunt in!"

He smiled at this, and then gave his attention to the pictures again.

The first one that he studied was an excellent photograph of Mordaunt in proper person. It could not have been better, and Nick decided then and there to preserve it for his private rogues' gallery.

The second one was labeled "Cadwalador." It showed a man who did not in the least resemble his supposed chief. He looked shorter, and stockier, and he wore a shock of white hair and a patriarchal beard which covered the shirt-front; but it was Mordaunt, although Nick admitted to himself that if he had not already known of the deception he might not have discovered it. But, knowing it, he was able in many ways to trace the resemblance.

The third was labeled "Fink." It was unmistakably the picture of a Jew; and such a Jew as we read about and see in plays at the theater. If you have ever seen Irving's make-up as "Fagin" you have only to recall it to see Fink before you; and he was the employment-agency man.

Here, there was not a trace of resemblance to Mordaunt, and Nick laughed aloud at the excellence of the disguise.

"I could not have done it half so well myself, I am afraid," he murmured; "at least, not unless I had tried very hard indeed."

But he laid that aside and picked up the fourth picture, for this was the one that interested him the most at the present moment.

It was labeled "Papa Slick"; an appropriate name, Nick thought, with a grimace.

"Papa Slick" was fat and flabby and oily to a degree. He wore an iron-gray wig and had a smooth face—and in this latter respect he was like Mordaunt. But, in some unknown manner, the artist in make-up had succeeded in destroying all resemblance to the proprietor of the hotel. Not a trace of him was left.

The photographer had "caught" him at a propitious moment—somewhere in the street when he was doubtless engaged in watching one of his victims, for he was stooping and gazing furtively around a corner; his eyes

were gleaming; there was a demoniacal grin upon his hard, although fat, face; he was leaning forward, resting his weight upon a cane-stick with both hands, and the suggestion of a hump on his back was accentuated by this position.

"That," said the detective, speaking aloud again, "is a masterpiece of make-up."

The detective remained for a long time motionless, studying the picture; and then suddenly, as if his mind were irrevocably made up, he sprang to his feet, and, leaving the pictures on the table, again opened the doors of the three closets and began rummaging among the contents.

He had not far to search, for presently he had tossed upon the floor behind him every article which he thought he would need.

Returning then, he compared them, one by one, with the picture of Papa Slick, nodding each time he verified an idea.

And then, with surprising alacrity, he began divesting himself of his own clothing.

The reader already understands what he was about to do.

The room was plentifully supplied with everything he needed to create the make-up.

A narrow but tall chiffonier at one side of the room had its drawers filled with the wigs and pigments that were necessary—and, in short, with every necessary article for each of the characters that Mordaunt was in the habit of creating. There was nothing wanting.

There was a long pier-glass in the room which came down to the floor, and before this the detective worked ceaselessly until he stepped back, at last, with all trace of Nick Carter entirely gone, and, instead, appeared the fatuitous, cruel, sinister, but withal expressionless, visage of Papa Slick.

Nick Carter was as adept in the art of making-up as any man in the world. Indeed, he had made it a study all his life, and, with the picture to help him, and with every article of the real costume ready at his hand, he had no difficulty whatever in perfectly reproducing the character which was dreaded and feared by all the employes of the Blackmailers' Syndicate.

He had only to add the costume now; and this he did quickly.

When it was completed and he stood before the pier-glass entirely arrayed in the character, he could not avoid a shudder at his own reflection.

He was "Papa Slick," even to the hump and the cane, upon which he leaned in an attitude exactly like that on the picture.

The frowzy hair, unkempt, falling almost upon the face; the whiskers, the brownish fringe around the bottom; the collarless shirt, with soiled wristbands; the long frock coat, with its greasy collar, its ragged buttonholes, and its shiny back where the hump made it prominent; the tall hat, of ancient lineage, which had been innocent of a brush for years; the cracked patent-leather shoes, worn down at the heels.

The whole dress was the personification of the shabby-genteel, barring the dirt; for the shabby-genteel likes to be clean.

He left his own garments in the room, having supplied himself with such articles as he might need from the pockets; and then, with a last survey of his surroundings, he prepared to return to the private office where he had parted with Clark.

"There is just one person who would not be deceived by this costume," he mused, as he was about to leave the room, "and that is Madge. She probably knows the four characters; she probably was the original suggestor of them herself—and she knows that the one man who should be behind the mask of any of them is at this moment in the Tombs. She knows something about Nick Carter, too, and it would not take her long to jump to the conclusion that it is I who am behind this make-up.

"But for the others—I need have no fear of them. They one and all fear old Papa Slick, and it will be strange if I cannot make them talk.

"The point is, now, shall I take Clark into my confidence, and let him know what I have done, or shall I make him think that I am indeed old Papa Slick, and have somehow got the best of Nick Carter? I will let circumstances decide that question for me."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF "PAPA SLICK."

When Nick made his way back again into the private office of the hotel where he had held the conversation with Clark he dropped into the chair at the desk—the chair in which Clark had been seated during the interview—and quietly awaited the return of that individual.

He was curious to observe what effect the sudden and unexplained appearance of "Papa Slick" upon the scene would have on Clark; he was curious to know what attitude Clark would assume when he became convinced that the troublesome detective was out of the way—for good, probably, for Nick had determined to create that impression.

Nick, of course, realized that the confessions of Clark were the result of nothing but fear; that there was not in his soul one whit of regret at what he had done, and that his conscience in no manner stood in the way of his continuing the life he had led.

But fear of the detective had conquered him.

He had been as ready to confess and to betray his former associates, as soon as he was brought face to

face with disaster, as he would now doubtless be ready to resume his old habits.

Even after the detective had resumed his seat in the private office an hour passed before Clark's return; but he came at last, opening the door with his key and stepping inside and closing it after him before he perceived that the chair at his desk was occupied.

And then he came to a halt with the suddenness of one who has received a blow.

His face, which had been smiling before, seemed to freeze into the expression it wore, so that his expression had the appearance of a grinning corpse rather than that of a living man.

His eyes stared as if they were sightless, and he stood stock-still in his tracks, as if he were stricken with paralysis.

It was plain that he felt only terror for this man whom he believed was confronting him; and his attitude suggested to Nick that he was not sure that it was the real man he saw—that it was not an apparition, a ghost.

Nick had never heard the voice which Mordaunt used in his disguise as Papa Slick; but he had heard Mordaunt's natural voice, and he had figured out about how to imitate the one which this character should assume.

And so now he sat upon the edge of the desk-chair, peering forward under bushy brows, with a grimace intended for a smile upon his face, with an unpleasant leer in his eyes, with the cane between his knees so that the head of it almost touched his chin, and with his hands rubbing themselves together like Uriah Heep's; and, after a full minute of this tableau, he murmured:

"So—so—so!"

He said it softly, purringly, insinuatingly, suggestively—unpleasantly; and Clark shivered as if a draft of air had struck him between the shoulders.

"Papa—Mister Slick!" he gasped, at last.

"No, no, no, my young friend;" Nick grinned at him. "Papa Slick is better. I like it. I do, really. I like you —— my son, I like you. You are superb; yes; yes; yes."

He ended the sentence by nodding his head, as if he were distinctly satisfied with what he had said; and then he grinned again.

"I thought——" began Clark; and stopped.

"Yes?" said Nick. "Yes? yes? yes? You thought? What?"

"I thought—that you had ——"

"Yes? yes? You thought that I had—what?"

"Gone away."

"Ah! So! Indeed! You thought that I had gone away! So! You thought quite correctly, my young friend. I had gone away. Now I have returned. Yes. Quite so. Now I have returned." He chuckled omniously. "I have returned!" he repeated. "Ah, so! You did not expect me? No?"

"No."

"So? So? Well. You did not expect me?"

"How—how did you come?" asked Clark, glancing nervously around him, as if he expected that another might be present in the room; and the detective knew that Clark was thinking of him at that moment; was wondering if by any chance Papa Slick could know that the detective had been in the building.

"Are you looking for anybody in particular?" asked Nick. "Yes? No?"

"I—I don't know, sir. Was—was anybody here when you came?"

"Yes, my young friend, somebody was here when I came; in there."

He pointed through the desk as he spoke, and Clark nearly collapsed on the floor in terror, for the gesture had replied to his unasked question regarding Nick Carter.

"In there?" he gasped.

"Yes. Yes. Yes. Even so. In there. It was. There was a man there. He is, in fact, there still. Quite still, in fact. He, he, he! Quite still. Very still." Then, with an abrupt change in manner and tone, he darted his head forward toward the now thoroughly terrified man, and almost shouted at him:

"Who let him in there? Did you?"

Clark could only nod his head in an affirmative. He could not have spoken in words just then if his life had depended upon the utterance.

"So! So! How did you know the secret of getting into those rooms, my young friend?"

The question was soft, purring; but Nick managed to incorporate a menace in it that chilled the blood of the man to whom it was addressed.

"I—I searched for it," he faltered. "I found it. I thought that something had happened to all of you. You know, of course, that Mr. Mordaunt has been arrested, and is now in the Tombs. Mr. Cadwalador has disappeared; Mr. Fink is gone. There was nobody here to do anything. I thought it was my duty to find a way into those rooms and to do what I could——"

"Aye; to do what you could to find if there was any money hidden there. No? Yes? Yes!"

"No, sir, I swear——"

"Tut, tut! Don't swear. It will do no good."

"But I do swear to you, sir, that I have never taken two steps across the threshold of that room. I did not dare."

"But you went far enough to see and to read the sign that is on the door from that room into the one beyond it? No? Yes?"

"Yes."

"And your courage failed you. It is well that you did not go farther. But, tell me now, how did Nick Carter get into that room?"

"You know him?" Clark almost shouted the question; and Nick smiled.

"Certainly, I know him. It is my business to know people, my young friend. It is part of my business to know you; to know you thoroughly; yes, quite thoroughly; yes."

"I let him in there," the suffering man admitted. "I had to do it. He had me cornered."

"Cornered? Was the desk-door open when he came into this room?"

"N-no."

"Then how did he know that there was an opening behind it? He could not have known of it if you had not shown him where it was, could he?"

"No-n-no."

"I thought not. So you did that of your own free will, didn't you. No? Yes? *Yes!*"

"Yes."

"Well, very much to your surprise, doubtless, I shall forgive you for it—this time; for you unwittingly did me a very great service. Yes. Yes, indeed. I was there, in those rooms beyond where you have penetrated, when Nick Carter was there. I got there, in fact, at precisely the same instant that he got there; and—the room contains no living man now."

Clark gave a mighty shudder; he gasped:

"You killed him?"

"Did I say so?" sharply.

"No."

"Did I say that there was a *dead* man there?"

"No."

"All that I said was that there was no living man there, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Is that telling you that I killed him?"

"No."

"Is that leading you to suppose that I have killed Nick Carter?"

"No, no, no."

"That is a very mysterious part of the house, my dearest young friend. But it is a part from which you had better keep away, for it isn't a healthy place for persons who are not asked to go there—and, sometimes, it isn't healthy for those who are asked. He, he, he! I should make a joke of that. Now, tell me if you did not have a long talk with Nick Carter."

"Yes. I must admit it, sir. I did have a long talk with him."

"I see. You are afraid that I have succeeded in inducing him to tell me all about that conversation. Perhaps you are right. Who knows? It is best for you, anyhow, to tell me all the truth. Did you, perhaps, betray all our secrets to him? No? Yes?"

"I could not tell him much, sir, because there is so little that I know to tell."

"Quite so, quite so. But you did tell him about the Chauffeur Club, didn't you?"

Clark's teeth were chattering now, as if he had an ague; but he answered:

"Y-y-yes."

"And also about the employment agency?"

"I could not help it, sir."

"And you showed him those beautiful pictures you took? No? Yes?"

"Yes."

"That picture of me? No? Yes? It was taken on the street? No? It is a masterpiece. I have been thinking that I ought to reward you for so much zeal. No? Don't you think so?"

"Oh, sir, spare me! I am weak, I know. If I were not, I would not be your slave, as I am."

"That is perhaps true. As for sparing you—we will see about that. It depends upon you yourself."

"How, sir?"

"Whether you tell me the truth about what you have been engaged in doing since the detective was here—alive. You know, my young friend, that it is more than likely that I discovered a way to force him to tell me what you had promised to do for him. It had something to do with the disappearance of a Mrs. Vanderbyke from her home; her being brought here in an automobile, and passing through the hotel in the company of Gipsy Madge, did it not? Ah, I see that I have guessed correctly. Now, Anthony, my son, you will be so good as to tell me exactly what you have done about it. It will be better for you, too, if you tell me the truth—this time. I might forgive you for that—this once. Did you get the information he sent you to get? No? Yes?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if he had been here, you would have given him that information? Answer me."

"Yes, sir. You have demanded the truth, and you shall have it, if I die for it. It was the only way to save my own neck. And I don't want to go to prison any more than you do. I supposed that you and all the others had deserted me, and left me here to bear the brunt of everything, and, inasmuch as I supposed you to be safe, there was no reason why I should hold my tongue, if, by holding it, I only sent myself to prison for twenty years."

"Quite right. But how, son Anthony, did you persuade the others to tell you what you wished to know?"

"I told them that you were here; that you had sent me to obtain the information; that you would have vengeance upon them if they refused to give it."

Nick Carter chuckled.

"You did well," he said. "I can almost forgive you—for that."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE GAME.

The detective continued to chuckle to himself for some time after that, for, while he believed that doing so was in keeping with the character he had assumed, he was also intensely pleased, for the information he had obtained rendered the things he had in view all the easier to accomplish.

The way was already paved for him, in his character of Papa Slick. The people he wished to interview in that character had already been apprised that Papa Slick was back again, and he knew by the genuine terror displayed by this man before him that the slimy old chap was thoroughly feared around that place.

"You will, perhaps, tell me now just what you did find out," he said at last to Clark. "I wish to know just what you would have told the detective had he been here in my place to get the news."

And now, for the first time, Clark exhibited something of his cunning, for he replied:

"You are asking me to tell you two things, Papa Slick."

"Two things?" said Nick. "How is that?"

"You asked me, first, to tell you what I found out about Mrs. Vanderbyke, and about where Madge has taken her; and then, in almost the same breath, you asked me what I should have told the detective, if he were here in your place."

"Well? Is it not the same?"

"Not by a long shot!"

"I see. I see. You intended then *not* to tell him what you found out?"

"Indeed I did not."

"Just what did you intend to tell him?"

"I had already made up a story for him; and—Well, after I had found out just what he intended to do about it, I intended to lead him into a trap, to get a few of the fellows to help me, and to get him out of the way—as much out of the way, maybe, as he is now."

"He! he! he! he! he! That is funny! As much out of the way as he is now! Anthony, my son, you deserve forgiveness for your joke. As much out of the way as he is now! Then you were going to lead the detective into a trap, were you?"

"I was."

"And would it have been a good trap, think you?"

"It would have been his finish—don't you forget that!"

"I won't. And you had it all cooked up, too. Anthony, my son, you are a lu-lu; and the detective would have been as much to have fallen into your trap, too. He told the truth as that. It is really too bad for your reputation among us that you have lost the opportunity. It is. Too. Bad. I could almost have left him alone for you if I had only known. I could, really. But now, my son, we have joked long enough. Let us get down to business."

"Yes, sir."

"I asked you to tell me what you found out. What did you find out about Madge's doings? You will be good enough to tell me the exact truth this time, for I don't at all like the methods she employed in this matter, and it is best that she should find it out."

"When Mrs. Vanderbyke was brought into the house," said Clark, "she was taken to Madge's rooms, and there she was dressed up as a maid. They put a wig on her and otherwise changed her appearance so that her own husband would not know her if he should see her in the street.

"But what would prevent her calling out to him if they should meet on the street?"

"They gave her a dose of Madge's loco."

"Eh?"

"They gave her a dose of Madge's loco. Surely you know what that is?"

"Son Anthony, I am not at all sure that I do know what that is. I think you had better tell me, in order that there can be no mistake. Madge, in fact, has several kinds of loco, and I am a bit curious to know which kind it was that she used."

"Oh, it wasn't her 'sleepers.' It was the 'funnies.'"

"Oh!"

"You know, Papa Slick. Weren't you here when she gave me a dose of it once? I think you were not, by the way. It was Mr. Mordaunt. It gives one a regular St. Vitas' dance—makes you twitch all over as if you had 'em; stops your powers of speech so that you can only stutter thickly, and raises the devil with anybody, only all the time they have their senses about them. It is the most horrible thing, the most awful experience, that I ever went through with. There is one good thing about it, though; it doesn't last long."

"No?"

"About half an hour, or an hour, at the most; and you feel fine and dandy when you come out of it, too."

"Really?"

"You are only joshing me now. You know as much about it as I do."

"Only that I have never been fool enough to swallow it."

"No."

"Well, go on. They disguised her and they gave her the 'funnies.' What then?"

"Then they took her out through the Chauffeurs' Club to the automobile that was waiting there for her. Madge and Jules got inside with her, and Craddock and Pineaud got up in front, and they started for the 'Château.'"

"Where——" Nick stopped. He had been about to ask where that was; but, fortunately, Clark misunder-

stood the partly asked question and only repeated his information.

"They took her to the Château," he said.

"Good! Now, tell me who is the best chauffeur in the club at the present time—who can command the use of the best machine for this evening, Anthony?"

"Porter is there."

"Porter, eh? What is he doing there at this time of the day?"

Nick had not the least idea who Porter was, but it seemed natural that he should ask the question, and he did so. The reply staggered him, for it told more and more of the endless ramifications of these blackmailers.

"Mr. Vanderbyke is, of course, searching over the city for his wife," said Clark. "He did not want Porter to-day; or, at least, he left him out; and Porter was mad about it, too."

"Naturally."

"He thought that something was up that he ought to know about, and so he managed to follow his master; and where do you suppose the man went?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world, my son. Where did he go?"

"Porter came directly here to report it. He went to Nick Carter's house!"

"You don't say so! Vanderbyke went to Nick Carter's house? Well! well! well!"

"And that isn't all. It was only a little while after that when he came out again, and who do you suppose Porter thought was with him?"

"Really, Anthony, you ask too many questions. Tell your story."

"Porter thought it was Jules; and, because he thought so, he let them get away from him; but when he got here and found that it could not have been Jules, because Jules had gone to the Château with Madge, he at once tumbled to the fact that the man was either Nick Carter, or one of his assistants, made up to represent Jules. You remember—or no; you had not heard. You have not been here since then."

"I remember and have not heard—what?"

"Why, once before one of those detectives made up to represent Jules—did it right before his eyes, too—and he says himself that it could have fooled anybody but his own mother, and that it would have fooled her, too, if she were alive."

"That was very cute of Jules—to say that. But the point you are making is evidently that Vanderbyke is going around the town in an automobile, with a chauffeur who is disguised to represent Jules, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he must have a distinct purpose in doing that."

"Whatever the purpose is, it won't work."

"No? Why not?"

"Because about a dozen of the chauffeurs are on his track already. They propose to corral the two of them and take them to the 'Château,' to put them to the torture, if need be, to make them tell all about it."

"Good! Good! Good! And that reminds me that I asked you a question a moment ago."

"What was it, sir?"

"I asked you for a chauffeur, and also what machine he could get——"

"Oh, yes. And I replied that Porter was there. As for a machine—— *I have it!*"

"You act as if you had *them*."

"Nick Carter's machine is at this minute in front of the hotel door. It has been standing there ever since he came here, almost three hours ago. He came alone, too."

"Do you mean that he did not have a chauffeur?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"What is to hinder Porter from running it into the garage, if you want to use it to-night? It can be kept there until you want it, and then Porter can drive you. He is the best chauffeur in the bunch."

"So I have heard. But the point is, is the Carter machine a good one?"

"The best ever, of its kind. It is a big Peerless, made especially for him. It is capable of great speed, if you wish to ride fast, and Porter is the man to drive it. And there isn't any chance that he will call for it to-night—the owner, I mean."

"Papa Slick" seemed to ponder over the question for a moment, and then he said:

"I think that will do very well. Tell Porter—you may go at once and attend to it—that I shall wish to go to the Château to-night."

"All right, sir."

"Wait. Tell him to come around in front of the hotel and get the machine at once—or, still better, go and get him and bring him here now."

Clark left the private office in a hurry, and Nick saw that in order to make his way to the other building he first went to one of the upper floors in the elevator. But after a little time he was back again, followed by Vanderbyke's chauffeur, whom Nick had often seen driving the young millionaire about the city.

And there had never been a breath of suspicion against Porter, either; and all the time he was an employee of the Blackmailers' Syndicate, ready to report everything that his master did to his employers—ready to betray him and to make him at any time one of their victims.

Nick could have struck the smiling face of the chauffeur when he first entered the room, but he controlled himself by pointing silently toward a chair and telling him to sit down. Such men talk most freely and impudently when on their feet, and it was one of Nick's

points to make them sit down in his presence, if he wished to interview them.

"Porter," he said, "I suppose that Clark has told you what I want of you? No? Yes?"

"Yes, sir. Part of it."

"Well, you will take the Carter automobile away from this vicinity at once. I don't care what you do with it until seven o'clock, but at that hour I wish you to meet me at the north end of Union Square, almost in front of the Everett House. There will be three men with me. You are to ask no questions and reply to none. But when you discover me drive up to the curb and take us in; and when we are inside you will go as straight and as fast as you can go without being pinched to the Château. Understand?"

"I do, sir."

"If you fail me——"

"I won't fail you, sir."

"See to it that you do not."

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH SECRET WAYS.

The detective thought deeply for a moment.

It was evident to him that if the happy thought had not occurred to him to make himself up in the character of "Papa Slick" the blackmailers might have won out in their efforts against him.

Already they were posted regarding the attempt of Vanderbyke to find out all about his former chauffeur, the fellow Jules. Already they had discovered that imposition upon them and were in hot pursuit of Patsy, who had made up in the character; and, with automobiles and chauffeurs without number at their command, it would be strange, indeed, if both Patsy and the young millionaire were not made to feel the power of these conspirators before darkness set in.

More than that, he would himself have fallen into the net.

He saw now very plainly that he could not have depended upon Clark to aid him. He understood now that Clark would have betrayed him at the first opportunity, and that it would only have been a question of hours before he would have been as securely a prisoner himself as was Lilian Vanderbyke.

When Porter had gone, and had taken the Peerless away from the door, Nick said to Clark:

"I am going outside now, my son. My orders are that you are to remain close inside the hotel until further orders. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may as well know that we are up against it rather hard for the present. There is no telling which way the cat will jump, and it may be that we will all have to make ourselves mighty scarce around here for a few days; but I will know before nightfall."

"And you will tell me, sir? You will not leave me to fall into the dragnet?"

"I will not leave anybody; least of all you, my son."

Nick moved the chair back from the desk and worked the lever, opening the secret door, as he had seen Clark do; and then, with a wave of his hand, he passed through and closed the aperture behind him.

His present purpose was to study the interior of that strange nest of buildings, that group of old houses fronting on the two streets and on the avenue, which had been made a part of the modern building of the hotel proper.

He knew that there were connecting links between the old buildings and the new one at the second or third floor of the hotel; and he realized, also, that there must be another, and a secret one, through the private quarters of Mordaunt, which he had already visited.

But he had not explored that secret passage, and now he determined to do so.

He did not pause this time in the room where he had made the change of costume, but went at once to the door opening upon the narrow passage.

It will be remembered that at the time he discovered this passage he had said to himself that here was the method used by Mordaunt for visiting secretly the other parts of his nest of conspiracy; that the passage must at least have three outlets, one to the employment agency, one to the Chauffeurs' Club, and a third one to the street, or through still another house to a way of escape for the man, if at any time he should be hotly pursued.

He had gone only a few steps along the passage, however, when he came to a point where an iron door was let into the wall, a door which suggested that beyond it was some sort of a storeroom, or depository, which was intended to be partly fireproof, if not wholly so.

He paused in front of it, examining it attentively, for he doubted the wisdom of taking the time just then for its exploration; but he was attracted by the fact that the iron door seemed to possess neither lock nor latch; there was not so much as a keyhole in sight.

The surface of it was smooth with the walls on either side.

Instantly Nick was interested.

Since the door possessed no visible handle by which it could be pulled open, even if it were unlocked, it followed, he thought, that it must be worked by some secret means not unlike that employed upon the desk door from the office into the private quarters.

Things of that sort always possessed an interest for the detective. He was fond of enigmas; he liked puzzles; cipher-writing interested him, and hidden locks

and springs for opening and closing doors to secret passages and rooms were always his hobby.

He looked around him on the walls on every side for some sign of a spring that he could press upon which would work the mechanism of the door; but there was not a thing in view; not even a nail-head that he could push.

He had turned on the switch of the electric light, and, therefore, everything in the passage was plainly visible.

He looked from floor to ceiling on either side of the mysterious door; he studied the door itself; the flooring in front of it and on each side of it; and then he looked above him, at the ceiling itself.

Here, a curious fact struck him.

Directly over his head was a single-arm gas-bracket, pendent from the ceiling in the middle of the passage in front of the iron door.

"I don't believe that gas-pipes have ever been run through this place," he mused. "The passage and everything connected with it is lighted by electricity from the hotel supply, so what is that gas-bracket doing there?"

He struck a match and turned on the cock, applying the flame to the burner; as he anticipated, there was no gas there.

He tried to move the bracket first one way and then another, but only succeeded in bending it, for it seemed to be firmly in place; and then he smiled grimly to himself as he murmured:

"If I were to ask 'the lady from Philadelphia' about this, and tell her that I had pressed it forward and backward, to the right and to the left, and had also pushed it on it, she'd doubtless say to me: 'Why don't you pull on it?' And so I will."

Suiting the action to the word, he pulled directly down upon the bracket—and the result was as sudden as it was surprising. The bracket came down easily to the floor of the passage, and the iron door set into the wall swung out at the bottom from hinges that were located at the top, leaving the place open for him to pass through as he would.

And, strangely enough, the room thus revealed was brilliantly lighted inside. The switch by which the lights had been turned on in the passage had also operated those inside the secret room.

Having assured himself that the door would not drop back into place and thus make him a prisoner inside the room, Nick passed through.

He found himself in an apartment which was perhaps ten feet square. A thick rug covered the floor; a small, square table was in the center of the room; one chair stood beside it; two sides of the room were lined with steel boxes placed one upon another, and each with an opening on its front, and the third side [illegible] with shelves containing books, like ledgers.

"The blackmailer's archives," murmured the detective, chuckling. "By Jove! The fellow is at least systematic about his operations!"

He crossed to the shelves and glanced at the books, to discover that each one bore on the outside a letter of the alphabet, and sometimes two, or even three; and he ran his finger along them until he came to the one which bore the letter V.

This he pulled down and placed on the shelf in front of him, and he turned the pages until he came upon the name he sought, which was *Vanderbyke*.

The entry referred him to a page in the same book; and there he found several pages that were filled with fine writing, and this he read through to the end with considerable interest, as a revelation of the methods of the blackmailers.

We need not reproduce it here. It began with a history of the Vanderbyke family; it told that Clarence Vanderbyke was the last of his race and that he had inherited all of the vast wealth accumulated by his fathers before him; then it told about the young man himself: his age, when he married and whom he had married; it gave a short account of Lilian herself, but referred the reader to another book and page for more particular reference to her and further knowledge about her; and, lastly, it referred the searcher to one of the steel boxes which lined two sides of the room.

Nick opened and examined the contents of that box, and he was amazed at what he discovered.

Here were private letters, filched from the house of Vanderbyke; private letters written and received by Clarence and by his wife; here were lengthened reports made by Jules Renier, chauffeur to Lilian; by Porter, chauffeur to Clarence; by Lilian's maid; by one of the footmen, and so on and on and on.

Nick saw and realized that so thorough was the system of espionage adopted by the blackmailers that the most trivial occurrence which happened in any one of the houses where the agents of their syndicate lived was immediately reported and entered in the archives here, for future reference and utility, when the occasion was ripe for it.

The detective took time, too, to look through the indices of some of the books, and he discovered that there was not a prominent family in the city of New York, nor a prominent official, whose every deed was not reported there, written down, and held against them or him.

And a flood of light broke upon the detective, explaining why Madge had been so quickly discharged by the magistrate before whom she had been arraigned, on the trumped-up plea that there was not sufficient evidence against her to hold her.

He turned to the index again, and sought for the name of that particular magistrate.

It was there. There were three pages of written matter against him; there were things mentioned which he could not afford to have known to the public, and Nick smiled grimly as he thought that it had only been necessary for Madge to find a man to intimate to the judge that these things were known against him and would be used unless she was released.

He snapped the book shut, not without admiration for the system, but with infinite disgust, nevertheless; and then he passed out of the strong room again, into the passage, dropped the door into place, and, leaving everything as he had found it, continued thoughtfully on his way toward further discoveries.

After a little he came to a point where the passages formed a cross; and here, he told himself, were the three exits.

Remembering the general direction of the passage, he decided that the arm of the cross toward the right must lead to the employment agency on the avenue; that the one which continued on straight ahead of him must ultimately take him to the Chauffeurs' Club, and that, therefore, the arm of the cross to the left must be the exit which he had guessed existed, but which had not been mentioned to him.

He turned to the right, and after a considerable walk he came to a door which opened readily enough to his touch; and here the unmistakable odor of an employment agency assailed his nostrils.

Proceeding on his way, he found himself, presently, in a small room, furnished like a private office; and beyond a partition which confronted him he could hear voices.

There was a door through this partition, and he opened it boldly, framing himself in the doorway; and he smiled grimly when he saw the effect which his sudden entrance had upon the people who were collected there.

The talk ceased on the instant: two of the clerks dropped their pens to the floor, in their sudden terror; mouths dropped open; eyes stared; trembling seemed to seize upon every person who was in that room, and there were fully a score of them.

And then, without uttering a word and as silently as he came, Nick closed the door again and stepped back out of sight.

"Now for the chauffeurs' club," he murmured, as he turned away. "Truly, the presence of Papa Slick fills them all with terror. I wonder how it will affect the chauffeurs?"

He returned to the passageway and hurried along it to the intersection of the cross, and presently, by use of the same methods he adopted before, he found himself inside another private room behind the Chauffeurs' Club; and he was about to step forward and open the second door in order to appear suddenly among them, as he had done in the agency rooms, when he heard a voice which made him stop and draw back again with all the haste he could command.

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE IN THE SECRET ROOM.

It was the voice of Gipsy Madge that Nick Carter heard, and which arrested his steps so suddenly.

In some way she had already returned from that mysterious resort which they referred to as "The Château," after consigning Lilian to the care of others, doubtless.

But that was not all; there was another voice, that replied to her, and Nick Carter, when he heard it, started even more violently than he had done before.

For that second voice was unmistakably the voice of Mordaunt.

Mordaunt was supposed, at that moment, to be safely locked up in the Tombs—the Tombs, from which there was supposed to be no possibility of escape; and yet Mordaunt was here. If the sound of his voice were not sufficient, the words he said were, for they were both laughing about the cleverness and the simplicity of the escape.

It appeared from their talk that Mordaunt kept a second set of disguises at another place than his secret rooms at the hotel—probably at the 'Château.' And that Madge had somehow managed to smuggle to him the necessary clothing and make-up for his experiment.

The particulars of the escape Nick could not learn; and it may as well be stated right here that they were never known at all outside a few, for the men he had succeeded in fooling did not care to ventilate upon his act.

It was enough, in all conscience, that he had escaped;

that he was here; that he was a present menace to the detective, and that he might yet succeed in foiling the detective and in making his escape thorough.

One important point which the detective gleaned from the conversation he overheard was that Mordaunt was at that very moment also disguised as Papa Slick—and so there were *two* Papa Slicks, there, in that building at the moment.

"It would be curious if we should happen to come face to face," thought the detective.. "I fancy that it would be rather difficult to tell which was which, by the employees;" and then he gave his entire attention to what was going on in the next room.

It was at once evident that the two were plotting together for a general desertion of their old haunts. Madge was doing most of the talking—or commanding—for she was giving her companion orders.

"It is all up with this hotel affair," she said, "and you know it. All our work in that line has gone for nothing, and we must abandon it. We have got to light out and disappear, and we must abandon the employment agency and this club at the same time. There is no two ways about that, and you know it."

"No, I suppose not," admitted Mordaunt, with regret in his tone. "Think of the money we have spent to make that plant as perfect as it is! Think of the beautiful arrangements I have completed, for living respectably as Mordaunt, running the employment agency as Fink, and presiding over this club as Cadwalador, while I acted upon the whole outfit in this character of Papa Slick. And Madge, I don't now believe that the police could ever find that secret room of mine, where I keep the records."

"Bah!" she exclaimed, in reply, laughing harshly. "You don't half-know Nick Carter. Nothing feazes that man. He is the very devil."

"Even so——"

"Listen to me! When the time comes for him to search the hotel and the things that are associated with it, he will not be two hours in discovering every secret that you have got hidden away there. That is as sure as you are alive."

"I don't believe it."

"I do. You don't want him to find and to get possession of all your records, do you? The records that we have been years getting together? You don't want to lose them, do you?"

"No; of course not."

"Then there is only one thing to do, and that is to move them—*now*. I tell you, Geoff"—she called him by his dead brother's name—"that if you do not do as I say, I will shake you. I'll not be tied to you, if you're going to be obstinate. You can go your own way if you want to, but I don't go with you. You can go my way if you want to, and we'll stick together. How long do you suppose you would last without me?"

"Not very long, Madge; that is the truth. I will do as you say, Madge. Give your orders."

"Now you are talking sense. The first thing to do, then, is to move those records."

"I suppose so—yes."

"You have got to do that alone, for I can't help you. I have other things to do—and it goes without saying that we don't want to take anybody, even among our own men or women, into our confidence."

"Great Scott! it will take me three hours to move all that stuff."

"All the same, you will have to do it if you wish to save it."

"Where shall I take it? Tell me what your plans are."

"Take the books and the cords to the flitting-house. It is only two doors from here, but there isn't a chauffeur, not even Jules, who suspects that it is a secret way of escape which you provided for yourself and for me."

"That is true enough."

"Get the things moved in there as soon as you can. You ought to do it in a little more than an hour if you work hard. In an hour and a half from now, or, anyhow, in two hours, I will be in front of the 'flitting-house' with a big automobile. We can load the stuff into it and skip at once for the 'Château.'"

"But the whole outfit knows about the Château, Madge."

"You fool! Do you suppose that I intend to stay there? We will hardly get out of the machine when we go there. I want to get Lilian, that is all. And the moment we have her safely with us, we will get away—and we'll make a get-away that will surprise the natives."

"Who will we let into the secret?"

"Nobody. Not one of them. Let the female rats run off the island. We don't want any of them. When we settle down to begin over, we'll get a new set of work-

...s. It will take a little time, but it is the only way. The coppers will have every one of these fellows who work for us now spotted, and it wouldn't be long before he would be in the toils again. It has got to be a complete get-away."

"All right."

"Now, don't show yourself any more than you have to. Of course, some of the boys in the other room have seen you already, and, therefore, they know that Papa Slick is around. It won't hurt them to know that."

Nick Carter permitted himself to smile at that.

"I wouldn't enter the hotel at all if I were you," continued Madge. "There is no reason why you should do so, and it is ten to one that somebody sent by Nick Carter is already there on the watch. He doesn't let the grass grow under his feet. He proved that by sending the fellow Patsy to take the place of Jules; but it didn't work. He'll never see Patsy again, anyhow."

"Have you got him, Madge?" asked Mordaunt.

"Got him? Yes! And Vanderbyke with him. They are both safely at the Château now."

"*Vanderbyke!* What the dev——"

Madge interrupted him with a loud laugh.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do with him," she replied, anticipating his question. "I am going to show him the dead body of his wife, and after that——"

"The dead body of his wife! Have you killed her?"

"What a fool you can be sometimes, Geoff. No, I have not killed her. I don't intend to do away with her in that way, either. I'll let her do her own killing when the time comes."

"Then now——"

"One would think that you had utterly lost your senses during the short time you have been in the Tombs. I'm going to dose her, that is all. Dose her, and then lay her out as if she were a corpse; paint her a little, if necessary; anyhow, make her look as if she were dead. Then I'll let him see her. And after that I will give him time—as much as he wants; but ultimately he will have to do one of two things, if he wants to get out of my clutches alive."

"What two, Madge?"

"He can take his choice between giving up a couple of millions in cash, to me—or making me his wife."

"But if his wife is *not* dead, how can he do that?"

"He will think that she is dead, won't he? All that I want is a chance to get hold of the family jewels, and that won't take long. You leave my plans alone and do what I tell you, if you want me to stick to you, Geoff."

"But I don't like that marrying idea, and I won't——"

"Yes, you will. Don't be a silly. Now, do you realize that time is passing? It will be dark in a few hours, and we ought to get to the Château by that time."

"All right. I'm to move the stuff into the 'flitting-house' and you are to be there in two hours or a little less to take it away. Is that the idea?"

"That's the ticket. I'll go now."

The listening detective lost no time then in stepping back into the passageway through which he had come, for he had laid his plans even while the two were talking together, and he knew now exactly what he was to do.

Having closed the door after him, he sped along the passage toward the private rooms of Mordaunt, which he had first entered from the hotel.

He felt assured that Mordaunt would visit those rooms first to possess himself of many things that were there; and that after that he would go to the room of the records, in order to get the books and the contents of the steel boxes, which he intended to carry to the place he called the "flitting-house," where Madge was to come for them in an automobile.

Once, while he hurried along the passage, Nick partly halted, for he had a momentary feeling of indecision as to whether it would not be better for him to wait until something had shown him that other secret passage; but he had no doubt that it was as plainly to be followed as those he had already explored, and so he went on to the rooms that have already been described.

Nor had he long to wait when he got there, for he had barely arranged everything to his satisfaction, so that at first glance Mordaunt would not realize that his sanctuary had been entered during his absence, when he heard the sound of his approaching footsteps along the cemented corridor.

When Mordaunt entered the room, Nick was concealed inside one of the closets in the bedroom, and as the detective had anticipated, Mordaunt merely devoted a glance to that room before he passed on to the next one, the one that was so sumptuously furnished and decorated.

And as soon as he had passed through the bedroom

and stepped inside the other room, Nick stepped from his place of concealment and stole softly after him.

The two men were dressed exactly alike; they looked exactly alike in every particular. Nick smiled when he thought of it; and then he stepped quickly and silently forward through the door behind Mordaunt, nor paused until he was within four or five feet of him; and then he stood there like a statue, waiting for Mordaunt to turn about and discover that he was not alone—that there was another Papa Slick in the world, and that the other one was there with him, ready to dispute possession of the place.

And then Mordaunt turned around and saw Nick.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE MAN WITHOUT A PRICE.

Nick Carter knew that Mordaunt was no coward, but he was totally unprepared for the manner in which the blackmailer met and withstood the shock which the presence of a second Papa Slick in that room must have visited upon him.

For a moment he stared; then he smiled—and Nick smiled also; and then he broke into a genuine laugh, as if he were intensely amused by the encounter.

It was funny, too. If you have ever seen the Hanlons in their "Voyage en Suisse," and have witnessed the act they did supposedly before a mirror, you will understand how exactly alike these two men appeared in the present instance.

Nevertheless, Nick could not understand the attitude that Mordaunt assumed; but all the same he waited for Mordaunt to speak first, which he presently did.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in exactly the tone he would have used in the main office of the hotel. "You look damnably like me; but you are not, so who are you?"

"I am Nick Carter," was the quiet reply.

It was rather a startling bit of information, but Mordaunt did not appear to so receive it. He laughed again; and then, without moving, he asked:

"How did you get here?"

"I came through the hotel."

"Oh! Did somebody show you the way?"

"Yes, Clark." Nick rather enjoyed the scene, and thought it just as well to humor the man for a few moments. Mordaunt seemed to think over that last statement.

"I wasn't aware that Clark knew about the entrance through the desk," he said then.

"I wasn't either—at first," said Nick.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since I first came," replied Nick, who was beginning to tire of the comedy. "I have with me here a very fine pair of steel bracelets, Mordaunt. If you will stick out your hands, I will help you on with them."

"Will you? Thanks. Wait a moment. I am not ready yet."

"I am ready. There is a lot to do before Madge returns, Mordaunt."

"Oh. You heard that, did you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you couldn't get the books and things unless I showed you how, you know. I don't believe that you could even find out where they are kept. And I was thinking——"

"Oh, yes, I could find them. I have already found them, in fact, and had a look at them."

"Really?"

"Yes; really."

"You got inside of the strong room, where my records are kept?"

"I did."

"Isn't it a peach of a place? I didn't think that anybody would ever succeed in getting in there. How did you do it?"

"I pulled down the gas-bracket overhead."

"Now, who the devil told you how to do that?"

"Nobody told me. I found it out. It is very simple."

"Is it? Well, maybe it is, only I didn't think so—until now. As I said a moment ago, I was thinking."

"Well. If you have anything to say be quick about it, for I wish to put these bracelets on you."

"I was wondering if you couldn't be induced to leave them off, Carter."

"I don't think so."

"I might suggest to you that there is one place of hiding in these rooms that you have not found."

"What is it?"

"It is a place where I keep some spare cash. Just now it happens to contain something like a hundred thousand dollars. If you would be willing to give me half-an-hour start afterward, I wouldn't mind showing you where that place is."

Nick could not repress a smile at this. Before him

was a man who believed that everybody had a price, at which he would sell out.

"Is that a bribe, Mordaunt?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose some people would call it that; yes."

"Come! Put out your hands! You have got to go back to the Tombs."

"Do you mean that you refuse to take the money and let me go?" asked Mordaunt, in undisguised amazement.

"Yes."

"Isn't it enough?"

"No."

"It is all that I can raise on the spot. I might, if you would give me time——"

"Drop all that. Put out your hands."

"Hold on a minute, Carter. Isn't there some manner in which we can fix this?"

"You are so accustomed to 'fixing things' that you suppose everybody can be 'fixed,'" said the detective.

"I have yet to meet the man who could not be 'fixed.'"

"Well, you have found one. I'm not going to wait and talk with you any longer. But——"

With a suddenness that was surprising, Mordaunt did put out his hands; and he sprang forward upon the detective at the same instant.

The effect was to take the detective rather unawares, for, although in the beginning of the scene he had expected some such effort on Mordaunt's part, the talk had made him suppose that the blackmailer would prove an easy captive.

But he was about to learn otherwise.

In build the two men were about the same, and Mordaunt was wonderfully muscular and agile—almost as much so as the detective himself.

The suddenness of his attack gave him a momentary advantage, and he managed to secure a hold which otherwise he could not have obtained.

It gave Nick no chance to use his fists, and little chance to use his arms, for, confident that Mordaunt was on the point of submitting, he held the handcuffs ready to lock them on the wrists of his captive.

But Mordaunt was not Nick Carter's captive as yet. Far from it.

The moment they came together, the blackmailer locked his arms around the body of the detective, and his weight bore Nick backward, so that both men fell to the floor, where they rolled over and over, to the utter confusion of the furniture in the place.

The table and several chairs were overturned, and even as they struggled together, Nick wondered if the noise of the struggle could be heard in the hotel office, and what the consequences would be if Clark should enter there, to find out what was going on, and should discover that there were two Papa Slicks.

He would not know which one to assist, and could only stand and look on until one or the other should conquer —and then accept that one as his chief.

Mordaunt fought like a demon.

He tried to bite and scratch; he made use of every effort he could summon to get away from Nick Carter and to overcome him; and Nick was, in turn, surprised at the strength of the man.

But at last, by the use of sheer muscular force, Nick succeeded in obtaining the hold he wanted, and then it was only a question of seconds before he lifted Mordaunt from his feet and dashed him down upon the floor with a shock that half-stunned him; and in another instant the detective had snapped the handcuffs on his wrists behind his back.

In the struggle, much of the disguise of each of them had been disarranged; and now Nick attended to readjusting his own, as Papa Slick, with great care, standing before the glass as he did so, and keeping a careful eye over his shoulder upon his captive in the meantime.

But Mordaunt seemed to be entirely subdued now.

He remained very quiet, save that he was breathing hard from his recent exertions, and he watched the detective with interest.

At last he could restrain his curiosity no longer, and he blurted out:

"I'd like to know how in blazes you ever made up in that way so perfectly. Madge has told me that you could do it, but I didn't believe her."

"Madge is exceedingly wise," was Nick's reply.

"You bet she is; too wise about some things. What is your game now? Why are you fixing that disguise again?"

"I'm going to keep your engagement with Madge."

"Oh! I had forgotten that. Say."

"Well?"

"Isn't there some way that we can 'fix' this thing?"

Nick did not reply.

"What good will it do you, anyhow, to take me to limbo? Eh? You don't make anything by it, do you?"

"I get you. I get Madge. I save Mrs. Vanderbyke—and I get satisfaction."

"What is all that to the cold cash? I don't mind telling you that I can raise more than I said. Just listen to me, and let me tell you something."

"Well?"

"I wasn't going to monkey with those plans of Madge. I hadn't the least intention of waiting here for her, and of going to the Château with her. That was all a bluff on my part."

"Was it? What were you going to do?"

"I'll tell you. I was going to take a few things that I wanted out of this room. In half an hour I would have lighted out of here through the 'flitting-house'—I suppose you know where that is, too—and made tracks for a steamship that I know about. It is one that sails for Argentina to-morrow morning, at daylight. I would have been a passenger on board of that ship, and I would never have set my foot in this country again. That was exactly what I intended to do. America would have been rid of me forever, and would have been saved the expense of prosecuting me and keeping me in prison."

"America doesn't mind the expense at all, Mordaunt."

"Listen. I'm not through. I was going to take that dough with me. There is more than a hundred thousand of it. Nobody knows that I have got it. Even Madge doesn't know. I fooled her about it, all right. Now, I was going to take that. I was going to South America and begin over under another name, doing the respectable act; live like a gentleman. Now, if you will let me go, I will——"

"It is no use, Mordaunt." Nick turned away from the glass and crossed the room, until he stood in front of his captive. "You have got to go back to the Tombs. I am going to bind you and gag you, and otherwise fix you so that you cannot move so much as a finger or make a sound, and then, after I have taken some of the books and papers out of your record-room, I shall place you in there for safe-keeping until I can find time to come back and get you."

As Nick ceased speaking, he stepped forward quickly, and in an instant he had thrown Mordaunt to the floor again, and was busily engaged in binding him.

There were also cords in plenty in the room, for the place was filled with pictures, and soon Mordaunt was trussed up in such a manner that there was no chance whatever for him to get loose again, without assistance. And when he realized this, he said:

"All right, Carter. Now, I have got one more thing to say. It is this: If ever I get free again, and I will some day, I will use the rest of my life in hunting you. And I will get you, too, don't forget that. I'll put every other desire of my heart aside for that one purpose. I swear it!"

"All right," said Nick, laughing. "In the meantime—I'll proceed with what I have to do."

An hour later Nick Carter was awaiting Madge in the "flitting-house."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST TRICK IN THE GAME.

Nick Carter was well aware that Gipsy Madge was the sharpest and the shrewdest of her class. He knew, also, that his own disguise was perfect—so far as appearances went; he was not so certain about the intonation of his voice, although he had studied that part carefully before he parted with Mordaunt, inducing him to talk, and mimicking him.

And he doubted if Madge would guess the truth, unless she should somehow have learned that there had been two Papa Slicks around the neighborhood that day.

There was just one chance that she might have obtained that information; it was possible that after leaving Mordaunt at the Chauffeurs' Club she might have had the effrontery to go around to the hotel. If she had dared to do that—and it was not likely that she had—she would have seen Clark, and she would have heard from him all about the visit of Nick Carter and the incidents that followed it.

For while Clark supposed that he had talked with the real Papa Slick, and also that Nick Carter was lying dead in those secret rooms, Madge would know otherwise.

However, it was a chance that the detective had to take.

The appointment he had made with the chauffeur, Porter, he had decided to forego. It had been his intention to get Chick and Ten-Ichi, and probably one other man from the central office, and to meet Porter near the Everett House, and be taken by him to that retreat so often mentioned among the conspirators as the "Château." So Nick had no idea where the Château was located.

The time set by Madge for coming after Mordaunt

was soon after five that afternoon; she had said that she would be there in an hour and a half or two hours, and that would bring it to about that time.

And Nick had found little difficulty in tracing out the passageway to the "fitting-house" they had mentioned. It was merely one of the houses in the street, two doors away from the Chauffeurs' Club; and Nick found that nobody lived there. It was doubtless down on the books of the police as a "Closed house. Family away."

The detective carried enough of the books and papers to this house from the record-room to make Madge think that he had brought all that was necessary.

The part of the deception which the detective dreaded the most was that portion which would occur during the ride to the Château, wherever that might be.

During that time he would have to sit alone in the automobile, inside the limousine body with Madge, and he hardly doubted that she would discover the imposition long before they could reach their journey's end.

However, to await her and to go with her now was the only course there was to pursue, if he hoped to succeed that night in saving the three persons who had fallen into Madge's power: Lilian, Clarence, and Patsy.

It was six o'clock when she appeared—when the automobile drew up before the door, and he saw her get down and approach the house, from the window where he was watching.

He went hastily to the front door and opened it for her, and he saw her start back with an exclamation of surprise at sight of him.

"I thought you were going to change your disguise," she said coldly. "You are a fool not to have done so." He knew then that there was a part of the conversation between her and Mordaunt that he had not overheard; but he replied readily enough:

"There wasn't time." Then, because he saw nobody in the driver's seat of the automobile, he asked: "Who have you got with you?"

"Nobody. You will have to run the machine yourself."

"Here is a howdydo," he thought. "I don't in the least know where to run it to." Aloud he said coolly: "I can't, Madge. I have hurt my arm so that I could not steer the car to save my life. You will have to run it and I will get inside."

And that is the manner in which it was arranged. Nick managed to keep up the comedy of a strained arm while they were carrying the books out of the house; and he managed also to say as little to Madge as possible during that time; so that at last, when they did start, she had had little or no opportunity to penetrate his disguise, even had she suspected that he was not what he pretended to be.

But it was evident that she did not suspect.

It was quite dark when they left the house, for the month was November.

Madge guided the car dexterously and ran it swiftly to Broadway, to Seventh Avenue, to Fifty-ninth Street, to Eighth Avenue, into the park and through it, out of the park and along 110th Street to Second Avenue. They crossed the Harlem River at the Willis Avenue bridge, and then made toward City Island, but turned off before they were half-way there, and presently, having traversed a narrow, weed-grown road for two miles or more, they turned aside into a lane, and presently came to a standstill in front of one of the old-time mansions of that neighborhood, long since deserted, and forgotten, too, save by tramps.

And this was evidently the "Château."

Madge sprang to the ground and came to the door of the car; and to her evident surprise she found that her companion inside was lying back against the cushions as if he were ill, or had fainted, or was dead.

She opened the door hastily, and Nick opened his eyes and moaned. Then he said, evidently speaking with great difficulty:

"I think I must have hurt that arm a good deal worse than I thought. Leave everything here for the present, as it is, and help me inside the house—if I can get there without keeling over."

Madge was all attention at once. It was evident that she was fond of Mordaunt, in spite of every evidence to the contrary.

"Come," she said simply; and Nick leaned heavily upon her as they made their way along the weed-strewn path toward the front door, which opened as they advanced, opened to reveal Jules Renier waiting to receive them.

"Get some whisky, Jules," Madge called to him, and he left his post to obey the order, only hesitating long enough to hear her add that "Geoff has hurt himself."

Things could not have worked more admirably for Nick's purposes. The house was before him; the door was wide open; there was no one to dispute his entrance.

He was leaning upon Madge's shoulder heavily, and the instant they crossed the threshold, and when Nick was sure that Jules was far enough away so that he would not hear, he caught her in his arms, placed one hand over her mouth so that she could not cry out, and, lifting her from her feet, he ran back with her to the automobile where he had left everything in readiness for what he had to do.

"I am Nick Carter, Madge," he said to her. "You may as well give up."

And she did give up. She did not offer resistance when he put handcuffs on her wrists, and, with a second pair, fastened her to the body of the machine inside the limousine; and so he left her, returning to the door of the house just as Jules reappeared with a bottle and a glass in his hands.

The detective reached out to take the bottle from him, but he took the two wrists of the chauffeur instead, and he twisted them until Jules dropped upon the floor in pain, crying out that his arms were broken; but Nick knew that they were not, and, having provided himself with plenty of wire cord from Mordaunt's room, he soon had his man bound and helpless.

"Now," said Nick, "how many more of you are here?"

"Nobody," replied Jules.

"No? Where is Craddock? Where is Pineaud? Where the other one?"

"They are all tied up, in the cellar. Madge was going to take me with her, Papa Slick, and set the coppers onto the others that she left behind here."

A light broke upon the detective. He knew now why Jules had given him such an easy victory. The chauffeur believed him to be Papa Slick.

"All right," he said, keeping up the character. "There are three prisoners here. Where are they?"

"They are in the cellar, say; at least, two of them are. The woman is up-stairs in the room that you had fixed up. You know."

Nick did not know, but he had no doubt that he could find out, and he lost no time in hastening up the stairs, where he presently found the room referred to; found it because it was the only one that which was protected by new doors made of unstained oak.

But the key to the door was in the lock, and he turned it and entered, discovering that it was a prison with barred windows; that there was a table there, with a lamp burning upon it, and that Lilian Vanderbyke was seated near it, reading, although her book slipped to the floor and she leaped to her feet at Nick's entrance.

She was frightened, too, for she did not know the old man who stood before her; but Nick, with one wave of his arm, tore aside the wig he was wearing and stood revealed.

"I hope they have not misused you, Lilian," he said, advancing toward her and extending his hand.

"Nick Carter!" she cried out; and she threw herself upon his breast in a passion of tears.

"There, there!" he said. "I'll wager that you have not cried until now, so don't cry at all, Lilian. Besides, Clarence is somewhere down-stairs, a prisoner like yourself. Come with me and assist in the rescue."

He laughed, in order to cheer her, and she followed him from the room.

Down in the cellar there were five prisoners; the three chauffeurs, and Vanderbyke and Patsy; and Patsy looked about as crestfallen as possible when he faced his master.

"They got me as easy as if I'd been a cigar-sign," he said, with self-contempt. "And I am thinking that I'll let myself out for one, after this."

"All is well that ends well, Patsy," replied the detective, laughing. "Your friend Jules is up-stairs, tied hand and foot. I think you had better bring him down here and place him with the others. Then I will leave you here to watch them until I can send some policemen after them. I will take Madge along with me."

* * * * * * *

It is sufficient to state now that neither Madge nor Mordaunt got away this time. Nick saw them both safely behind the bars; and they remained there until they were tried and convicted, and sent away.

The nest of blackmailers was thoroughly broken up, and every one of the vampires who had been associated with it found his or her way to prison.

As for the records that Mordaunt had kept so carefully, Nick attended to them personally, and stood near-by until the last of them was burned to a cinder.

But Madge and Mordaunt each swore an oath of vengeance, not only against Nick Carter, but against his three assistants and the Vanderbykes as well. It remains to be seen if those oaths will ever be fulfilled.

THE END.

The next number—533—will contain "Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders."

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

505—The Man of Many Faces; or, Nick Carter Behind the Scenes.
506—A Letter From the Dead; or, Nick Carter's Proudest Moment.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook; or, Nick Carter's Amazing Experiment.
508—The Gentleman Crook's Last Act; or, Nick Carter and the Haunted House.
509—The "Skidoo" of the K. U. & T.; or, Nick Carter's Great Train Robbery Case.
510—The Last of the Outlaws; or, How Nick Carter Stopped the "Cannon-ball."
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery; or, The Secret of the Green Automobile.
512—A Battle of Wits; or, Nick Carter's Fight for Life.
513—A Game of Five Millions; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Fiend.
514—Codman the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Strangest Experience.
515—The Plot of the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Hairbreadth Escape.
516—The Mechanical Giant; or, Tousleh Plays a Lone Hand.
517—Doris, the Unknown; or, Nick Carter's Blindfold Mystery.
518—A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis.
519—Major Morley's Ghost; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight.
520—An Automobile Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Bloodhound on the Scent.
521—The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case.
522—The White Arm of a Woman; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Chase.
523—The Man in the Doorway; or, Nick Carter's Conquest of a Castle.
524—The Plot of the Baron; or, Nick Carter's Telling Strategy.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise.
526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

ISSUED EVERY TUESDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Buffalo Bill wins his way into the heart of every one who reads these strong stories of stirring adventure on the wide prairies of the West.

Boys, if you want tales of the West that are drawn true to life, do not pass these by.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

278—Buffalo Bill's Daring Plunge; or, The Grisly Ghost of Mahoe.
279—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Mission; or, The Round-up in Hidden Valley.
280—Buffalo Bill's Ghost Raid; or, Hot Times at Bubble Pricking.
281—Buffalo Bill's Traitor Guide; or, The Vengeance of Alkali Pete.
282—Buffalo Bill's Camp-fires; or, The Bad Man of Snake River Crossing.
283—Buffalo Bill Up a Stump; or, The Pawnee Faker of the Bitter Root.
284—Buffalo Bill's Secret Foe; or, The Wizard of Windy Gulch.
285—Buffalo Bill's Master-stroke; or, The Specter of Death Valley.
286—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Mystery; or, Teton John, the Half-breed.
287—Buffalo Bill and the Brazos Terror; or, The Lone Star Outlaws.
288—Buffalo Bill's Dance of Death; or, The Night Hawks of Snake River.
289—Buffalo Bill and the Creeping Terror; or, The Black Spider of the Shoshones.
290—Buffalo Bill and the Brand of Cain; or, The Wandering Jew of the Plains.
291—Buffalo Bill and the Mad Millionaire; or, The Redskin Rovers.
292—Buffalo Bill's Medicine-lodge; or, The White Queen of the Kickapoos.
293—Buffalo Bill in Peril; or, The Red Amazons of the Niobrarah.
294—Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Wolfer Joe on the War-path.
295—Buffalo Bill in the Death Desert; or, The Worship of the Phantom Flower.
296—Buffalo Bill in No Man's Land; or, The Sky-mirror of the Panhandle.
297—Buffalo Bill's Border Ruffians; or, The Desperate Game of Panther Pete.
298—Buffalo Bill's Black Eagles; or, The Snake-master from Timbuctoo.
299—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Dozen; or, The Raiders of Round-Robin Ranch.
300—Buffalo Bill's Rival; or, The Scalp-hunter of the Niobrarah.
301—Buffalo Bill's Ice Chase; or, The Trail of the Black Rifle.
302—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Bugler; or, The White Flower of Fetterman Prairie.
303—Buffalo Bill and the White Specter; or, The Mysterious Medicine-man of Spirit Lake.
304—Buffalo Bill's Death Defiance; or, The Bad Men of Timber Bar.
305—Buffalo Bill and the Barge Bandits; or, The Demon of Wolf River Cañon.
306—Buffalo Bill, the Desert Hotspur; or, Pizen Jane, of Cinnabar.
307—Buffalo Bill's Wild Range Riders; or, The Vengeance of Crazy Snake.
308—Buffalo Bill's Whirlwind Chase; or, The Mustang Catchers of Bitter Water.
309—Buffalo Bill's Red Retribution; or, The Raid of the Dancing Dervishes.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY THURSDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Diamond Dick and his son, Bertie, are true men of the Western plains. They are noble-hearted fellows who don't impose on the weaker man and who don't let anyone else do it if they can help it.

You ought to read how they clean up a mining camp of the dishonest gamblers and other toughs who usually prey on the uneducated miners.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

512—Diamond Dick in the Saddle; or, The Secret of the Steel Glove.
513—Diamond Dick's Greatest Peril; or, The Strange Hobo of Death Valley.
514—Diamond Dick's Outlaw Duel; or, The Bronco-buster of the Pecos.
515—Diamond Dick's Mystic Mark; or, The Handkerchief Man's Vendetta.
516—Diamond Dick's Race Riot; or, A Hot Brush in Mexico.
517—Diamond Dick's Ghostly Round-up; or, The Phantom Steer of K-Bar-6.
518—Diamond Dick's Big Drive; or, Holding Them Down in a Blizzard.
519—Diamond Dick's Trail of Vengeance; or, Tracked to the Rio Grande.
520—Diamond Dick Holds the Fort; or, Hot Work Along the Big River.
521—Diamond Dick's Steel Glove; or, The Smiling Man From Santa Fé.
522—Diamond Dick's No-name Mystery; or, The Smiling Man's Bad Mistake.
523—Diamond Dick's Midnight Stampede; or, The Horse-thieves of the Cimarron.
524—Diamond Dick's Forlorn Hope; or, The Siege of Adobe Castle.
525—Diamond Dick's Night Watch; or, The Pretty Girl of Falling Rock.
526—Diamond Dick's Three To One; or, Backed By Uncle Sam.
527—Diamond Dick's Golden Quest; or, The Secret of Snake River.
528—Diamond Dick's Long Leap; or, Single-handed Against a Giant.
529—Diamond Dick's Heiress Hunt; or, A Dash Through the Big Divide.
530—Diamond Dick at the Throttle; or, The Ghostly Headlight of Hoodoo Pass.
531—Diamond Dick's Hobo Trail; or, The Man with the Long Blue Scar.
532—Diamond Dick's Black Sign; or, A Strange Battle with a Dead Man.
533—Diamond Dick's Queer Rebuke; or, Giving a Lesson to a "Bad Man."
534—Diamond Dick's Night Ride; or, The Worth of a Thoroughbred Pard.
535—Diamond Dick on an Indian Trail; or, The Vengeance of a Navaho.
536—Diamond Dick in Arizona; or, The Foolhardy Sport of Grand Cañon.
537—Diamond Dick Over the Rio Grande; or, A Hunt for a Girl Through Mexico.
538—Diamond Dick's Shower of Gold; or, The Princess of the Montezumas.
539—Diamond Dick Below the Line; or, An American Against Big Odds.
540—Diamond Dick on Shipboard; or, Blocking a Slick Game.
541—Diamond Dick's Wide Loop; or, Roping Five at One Throw.
542—Diamond Dick's Royal Foe; or, The Strange Passage of the *Santa Cruz*.
543—Diamond Dick's College Scrap; or, A Battle For His Alma Mater.
544—Diamond Dick in the Deep Snows; or, A Close Call on the Yukon.
545—Diamond Dick's Merciless Trail; or, The Two Rascals of White Horse.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

How the Early Numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY May Be Secured

TO THE boys who take interest in the adventures of Frank Merriwell and want to read everything that was written about him, we desire to say that numbers 1 to 325 of the TIP TOP WEEKLY containing his early adventures are entirely out of stock and will not be reprinted. These numbers, however, were published in the Medal Library beginning with No. 150 which is entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all the Merriwell stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing.

We will send a complete catalogue of the Medal Library, which is just full of good things for boys, on receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY
AT 10 CENTS

150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.

MEDAL LIBRARY
AT 10 CENTS

304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.
368—Frank Merriwell's Generosity.
371—Frank Merriwell's Tricks.
374—Frank Merriwell's Temptation.
377—Frank Merriwell on Top.

NEW MEDAL LIBRARY
AT 15 CENTS. (Increased Size)

380—Frank Merriwell's Luck.
383—Frank Merriwell's Mascot.
386—Frank Merriwell's Reward.
389—Frank Merriwell's Phantom.
392—Frank Merriwell's Faith.
395—Frank Merriwell's Victories.
398—Frank Merriwell's Iron Nerve.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, NEW YORK

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication,

Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.